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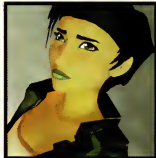
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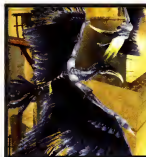
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POST

WHINE. WHINE. WHINE. THAT'S ALL YOU EVER DO. THIS MONTH'S BEST-OF, HAND PICKED FROM THE BAG OF GAB.



SPOOOOKY!

Dear GMR,
I'd just like to share a few weird experiences I've had with your Future Issue (Issue 09). Before you say anything about Caroline, the answer is no! (Unless, of course, she's free from moving and wants a bit...) Uh, back on topic. I've had some weird experiences with that issue. For example, while working on a small 3D project making a goomba (from Super Mario Bros.), the Future Issue comes through the door and behold! (I open to) "Courage Under Fire" (page 52) and I see goombas! Coincidence I thought, but then it

happened again! While reading and listening to my music, I heard Daft Punk's *One More Time*. Just as the words "one more time" were said, I looked down to see *Karaoke Revolution* (page 42), and behold, in the picture, the words "one more time" are there in front of me! Please tell me I'm not going insane, because I don't think my other personality would like that.

Yours faithfully,
Gerg - Greg's alternate personality

Gerg, Greg, whoever you are. These coincidences can be easily explained. We've been watching you, following your life, and engineering these so-called coincidences. Why? We just like messing with people.

GATECRASHER

Recently, my grandmother passed on. I was fortunate enough to be with her in her final hours. She left me a little inheritance. At the suggestion of her daughter, my mother, I want to use it to travel. Like any hardcore gamer, I'd love to go to E3 in L.A. more than anything else in the world.

I know E3's a press-only event, but is there any way, any way, I can get in? I'm sure people only ask you this about a



million times, but I am willing to do anything, whatever it takes.

If I have to clean urinals for the third assistant of the nephew of the limo driver who drives the press to a sneak peek of Shigeru Miyamoto's dry cleaning, then so be it!

Who should I contact about getting to E3? Like I said, I'm sure you've only been asked this more times than you can count, but I would appreciate any info,

anything that could get me one step closer.

thag_the_upset

Sorry about your grandmother, thag. We're sure she'd want you to have fun with that scrilla she dropped on you. But E3? Is a convention full of flashing lights, sweaty nerds, and bored-looking booth babes really the way you want to spend your vacation? Actually, it's a lot

MESSAGE BOARD JUNKIES

If you'd like to be considered for Message Board Junkies, go to www.hup.com and get yourself to the GMR site. You'll find a link, a day's supply of rations, and a miniature bible/Russian dictionary. Good luck.

While we were busy working on GMR #10, some of our message-board posters decided to have an impromptu conversation about the upcoming Final Fantasy games. Here is a transcript of that conversation (but not in its entirety).

Tactics has hooked me on RPGs. Thus, I will be getting FF:CC because I can get a hold of three

friends and three SPs. I am not going for any other FF because I don't fancy online play. (Also, customizing a moogles could turn out quite hilarious.)
-LuigSunshineX

I'll definitely get FFIX [the whole customization aspect and freedom pull me in, plus ever since

Star War's Galaxies, I love MMORPGs], but I'll try to get them all. The only one I would pass on is FFIX-2, I prefer the more "rustic" Final Fantasies.
Link1611

CC is the only one I'm thinking of as a rental before I buy. Other than that, I'm going to be

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of fun, but hard to get in. Try disguising yourself as Gary Coleman—that guy's always there.

AGAINST N-GAGE

Ten years ago, Gamepro magazine was accused of giving favorable reviews to games published by its sponsors. Ever since then, I have been skeptical of all reviews. So, when I saw your review for Nokia's N-Gage in the November issue, I read it with a grain of salt—especially since the magazine came packaged in a plastic wrapper that was sponsored by Nokia. Imagine my surprise and delight to read that you did not particularly like N-Gage. In fact, I have rarely seen a review that rated a product so poorly.

Keep up the great work!

Leonard Hernan
Author, *Phoenix: The Fall & Rise of Videogames*

FOR N-GAGE

Your review of the N-Gage has me wondering if a Nokia rep ran over your dog. Gamers had to learn extra buttons when we stepped up from Super Nintendo to the Playstation and it was worth it. As an owner of an N-Gage, I wish to point out some strengths of the system.

The 3D graphics are on par with a PSone. I did not find the screen spasmic at all. While there are more buttons than a Gameboy Advance, there are less than PCs and not all keys are used for games.

While some games do have ghosting, many others have true multiplayer competition. For me, I enjoy the ghost players in games that never offered any multiplayer before. As for "Really Familiar Games," we are not above remakes in movies, television OR games. I

love classics like Namco Museum despite familiarity. You must too as your website, Gamers.com, gave that a 7 (that's better than any game reviewed for N-Gage.)

Finally, who needs MIDI BGM when you can jam your favorite station while gaming?

I wish you would re-examine the N-Gage test we kill another Gameboy competitor, or did Nintendo give you a better gift bag at E3?

David Boop
Manager EB Games
Aurora, Colorado

MISS LONELYHEARTS

Hey guys, great mag. keep up the good work. Oh, but I was wondering if you guys could do me a little favor: OK, I broke up with my girlfriend like a month ago...actually, she broke up with me. Anyway, I love her, and I can't stop thinking about her. When we broke up, I said a lot of mean things I now regret. So, I want to show her that I really do care, 'cause she doesn't think so. Could you guys put, "This is for Eddie Cruz and the girl he loves. Amber, give him another chance to make it up" on your cover in big words or somewhere in big words? Thanks, it would be nice if you could.

Eddie Cruz

Maybe the fact that you're trying to impress your ex with a personalized message in a videogame magazine says more about why you have an ex girlfriend than anything else. Putting a sentiment into the pages of our magazine—nestled between an ad for *Arx Fatalis* and a picture

of Pfister in a penguin suit—that's better suited carved onto a picnic table might not be the most romantic thing you could think of (or maybe it is). If you really want to win her back, we suggest making a video of yourself singing *Total Eclipse of the Heart*, and then tearfully begging on your knees. Trust us, that always works.

HELLO TO YOU!

Good magazine you guys have. In the October 2003 issue, Dustin Quillen asked if there is a game you could play completely backward. As surprising as this may sound, there actually has been one: Hudson's *Bobobobo Bobobo Secret Technique #87.5, Exploding Nostril Hair Ultra Fight* for Game Boy Advance—released in December 2002 in Japan (obviously not released in North America)—included a From the End mode in which players could play the game from the end. (A gamer had suggested this, and Hudson used the idea.) I personally haven't played the game, but it seems very...unique from what I've read.

Jonathan Coley (Memphis, TN)

You're telling us about Bobobobo? Don't make Pfister blast you with his nose hairs, punk.



picking them all up. I want to make sure I can get a good experience with CC without having someone else to play with before I pick it up.

...Tila...

I'll buy them all, but I'm looking forward to FFIX the most. I was a little let down

by FFX's story/characters, so I'm a little upset that they decided to make X-2 the first FF sequel. FFXCC looks nothing short of amazing, but aside from the moogle, it doesn't look very much like your standard FF game. Whether that's a good or bad thing, I don't know.

-Corndog_dq

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"Got this month's issue of GMR. As always, it's a pleasant and enjoyable read."

-AutomaticForThePeople

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← Square Enix captured the lion's share of the attention at this year's TGS. With two new *Kingdom Hearts* games in tow, along with the announcement of *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children*, Square Enix was a tough act to follow.

TOKYO GAME SHOW '03

LIONS, TIGERS, AND COSPLAY. OH MY!

INTERNATIONAL REPORT

➔ If you missed the Square Enix conferences that opened the weekend, you missed almost everything of interest at this year's Tokyo Game Show. After those day-one bombs, there wasn't much to see from an industry that seems to be going through some lean years.

Square Enix will doubtlessly survive on the strength of its core franchises. Not one, but two *Kingdom Hearts* sequels are coming: *Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories* for GBA in 2004, and *Kingdom Hearts 2*, coming to PS2 at an unspecified date. *Chain of Memories* picks

up where the first game's story left off and looks to offer some sharp isometric action for GBA. The later PS2 sequel features Sora, Riku, and Kairi in their teenage years, with a black-clad Mickey Mouse battling cleanup.

Square's best-loved RPG is getting a sequel as well, though *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children* isn't a game—it's an hour-long DVD movie due in Japan next summer. Character designer Tetsuya Nomura and *Final Fantasy X* Director Yoshinori Kitase lead the project, which features Cloud and Sephiroth going at it again, two years after *FFVII*'s conclusion.

In 2004, Square plans to update *Final Fantasy XI* with new content (including player-versus-player gameplay) and to release three new PlayOnline games: *Ambrosia Odyssey* for PS2, a cooperative action-RPG; *Front Mission Online* for PS2 and PC, an online mecha-action game; and *Junkmetal* for PC, an Enix-born MMO mecha-combat project. *Junkmetal* was playable at TGS, while *Odyssey* and *Front Mission* begin beta testing next spring.

On the show floor, there were few surprises and more confirmation that Japanese publishers are in a rut. This year's trend is sword-driven 3D action,

with a few good games (*Onimusha 3*), some good-looking games (Taïto's *Bujingai*), and a lot of questionable games (*Dororo*, *Samurai 2*, *Shinsengumi*, *Magatama*, *Berserk*, *Seven Samurai 20XX*) featuring blades and blood as their central themes. We can thank the platinum-selling *Dynasty Warriors* for the proliferation of imitators, but it'll be a shame if games like *Ninja Gaiden* and *Onimusha 3* get lost in the shuffle.

Namco's refusal to jump onto the hack-and-slash bandwagon was an encouraging sign. Its best game drew the shortest lines, though—*Baten Kaitos I*—

XB

PC

PS2

GBA

GC



“Hideo Kojima called, and he wants his game back,” said a little voice inside our minds as we met with Spy Fiction developers, Access Games, at TGS. The game is actually pretty cool, though.

attracted few players despite its excellent graphics and fast battle scenes. Meanwhile, *Breakdown* and *R: Racing Evolution* fell short of their E3 hype. The blurry, jagged *Breakdown* demo stood in stark contrast to the prerendered trailer, and *R* still suffers from uninvolved handling. Trailers for *Ace Combat 5* and *Xenosaga: Episode II* inspired hope, but neither has a confirmed release date.

Capcom's lineup looked better than most. *Onimusha 2* was a favorite, despite short lines for the demo. *Resident Evil Outbreak* drew steady interest, and *Monster Hunter* featured gorgeous graphics and offset cooperative online gameplay. Even *GTA3* drew crowds and debuted before the show with respectable sales.

Sega, by comparison, still seems creatively adrift. Its brightest light was Treasure's ace *Astro Boy* side-scroller on GBA—which at least succeeds within its limitations—while Sega's other games have a lot left to prove. WOW's *Dororo* lacks depth, *Gungrave OD* needs more-focused level design, and *Sakura Taisen V*—a steam-punk manga Western beat-em-up (?)—looks like a genre-blending experiment gone horribly wrong.

Microsoft's dogged push in Japan continues unabated, and to be fair, it has a strong software lineup. *Project Gotham Racing 2*, *Rallisport Challenge 2*, *Steel Battalion: Line of Contact*, and other

playable titles all looked good, while *Phantom Dust* and *Jade Empire* made impressive debuts. MS needs to learn who not to put on stage, though. Peter Moore's a nice guy, but he's not the best choice for a pitchman in Japan.

Smaller companies brought smaller announcements, but some still worthy of note. SNK confirmed a 30 *King of Fighters* for PS2. Hudson's *Bank's Adventure* and *Adventure Island* remakes were the surprise hits of Konami's display, outshining *Suikoden IV*'s debut among nostalgic action fans. Sony brought the quirk with Masaya Matsuura's *Mojib Ribbon* (finally!) and *Bionic Commando* throwback *Chain Dive*. From Software delivered several surprising games: *Tenchu Kurenai*, a *Tenchu* sequel; *Nebula: Echo Night*, a sci-fi suspense adventure; and *Chrome Hound: Age of Arms*, an online mech-combat game for Xbox.

The industry went home from TGS with many questions and no easy answers; 2004 will be a rough year for both imitators and innovators, given steadily dropping sales in Japan. There's enough quality coming to keep hardcore fans happy, but the burst of creativity that will drive the next generation of consoles is temporarily on vacation.

David Smith

More info at www.up.com

WHY WE LOVE IT

TGS REMINDS US OF ALL THE THINGS WE NEVER SEE IN THE U.S.

Braving the morning rush-hour commute out to the Makuhari Messe—where the Tokyo Game Show is held every year—is no laughing matter. But if there's anyone bold enough to post up against the throngs of schoolgirls and coffee-drinking Japanese salarymen, it's our own Giant Milkman. When he wasn't barreling past hundreds of pushy show goers or handing his number out to booth babes, he was taking note of the finer things TGS had to offer, such as...

LOVELY BOOTH BABES:

The Japanese versus Western games discussion is hot right now, thanks to the recent success of titles like *GTA3* and *Halo*. But trust us when we say that we won't be reminiscing about *Rogue Ops* 20 years from now, or blowing wetty into our hanky like we did when we saw this Taiko model showing off a 25th-anniversary *Space Invaders* T-shirt. It has really been that long? Oh, how we've aged.



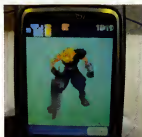
SUPA-FRESH MERCHANDISE:

The eternal question of who was the better rapper (Biggie or 2pac) may never be settled, but the answer to who has the better merchandise (United States or Japan) is a no-brainer. Whether drooling over things like this *Astro Boy* display or trying to rationalize spending \$140 (U.S.) on a *Final Fantasy XIII* silver necklace (we did), we left the show broke and certain that Japan has the goods.



COOL TECHNO CRAP:

If we were to set our clocks by the current level of coolness of our high-tech toys here in the States, right now, it'd be 1998. Our most expensive, state-of-the-art minidisc players pale next to the cheapest, low-end models in Japan. Likewise, our cell phones stink compared to theirs. This DoCoMo cell phone has a fully 3D (and fully swivel) rotating Cloud (or FFVII) screensaver installed.



GROWN MEN IN FUNNY SUITS:

The gaming industry isn't nearly as sexy as you might think it is. While we do get to play games for a living, it takes many man hours and late nights to make the magazine you're holding in your hands. Still, we know we've got it good, especially in contrast to this poor bozo handing out *Karaoke Revolution* pamphlets while dressed up as a microphone. (We like to call him Mike.) ☹





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UNTAPPED!

ONE MORE HANDHELD TO EMPTY (AND THEN FILL) OUR POCKETS

U.S.A.

After playing with the first TapWave Zodiac to roll off the assembly line, we can safely say that there's no way in hell you could confuse it with a Game Boy Advance. For starters, the Zodiac's screen is larger and looks sharper than a GBA's. The Zodiac has an analog thumb pad, six buttons, and an ATI graphics chip. More important, it does a whole lot more than just play games (but while we're on that topic, the games are shaping up nicely—and the Zodiac supports the hundreds of Palm

OS titles already out). It plays MP3s, can stash Tom's barnyard porn video collection, and is ready for wireless head-to-head gaming. This ain't some kids' system—it's a Game Man.

Yes, Nokia recently tried knocking Nintendo down a few pegs with the N-Gage. We know how that battle is faring so far (see our review last issue). What remains to be seen is how the Zodiac will fit into this picture. It's got a slew of titles, a powerful Palm OS PDA to back it

up, and a head start on Sony's PSP. We'll let ya

know our final

verdict next

month, when

we get our

hands on the

TapWave Launch

titles. **—Darren Gladstone**



More info at www.tapwave.com

SO FRAME!

SPIELBERG GETS SCARY

U.S.A.

Tecmo and DreamWorks have announced that writer John Rogers (*The Core*, *Catwoman*) has been named producer of the upcoming *Fatal Frame* movie, and that the film has been put on the studio's production fast track.

True to the game, the movie's plot will be set in Japan—a good sign that Rogers intends to remain faithful to the original material. Rogers explains, "By focusing on cool Japanese cultural additions and different ghost 'myths' most North American audiences are unfamiliar with, we can do something unique." Another promising sign: DreamWorks boss Steven Spielberg

is directly involved. Can *Fatal Frame* outspook *The Ring*? **—E**



More info at www.tecmo.com

GAMEPORT

VITAL GAME INFO. NOW BOARDING.

Arrivals COMING SOON

SYSTEM	ETA	TITLE	HOW HOT?
XBOX/PC	NOV	ARMOE & DANGEROUS Everyone squirts lunner with an English accent.	♦♦♦♦
ALL	NOV	LOTR: THE RETURN OF THE KING The last movie, but definitely not the last game.	♦♦♦♦
XBOX	NOV	RAINBOW SIX 3 Night-vision goggles are cool.	♦♦♦♦
GC, PC, PS2, XBOX	NOV	JAMES BOND: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING We'll take everything, thanks.	♦♦♦♦
GC, PS2, XBOX	NOV	MEAL OF HONOR: RISING SUN Retire Pearl Harbor, sans Ben Affleck.	♦♦♦♦
GC, PS2, XBOX	NOV	TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF L.A. To live and to get out of your car in L.A.	♦♦♦♦
PC	NOV	CONTRACT J.A.C.K. You're working for H.A.R.M. and kicking A.S.S.	♦♦♦♦
PC	DEC	OEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR If it's invisible, are we sure it's happening?	♦♦♦♦
GBA, XBOX	DEC	MISSION IMPOSSIBLE: OPERATION SURMA Hope the discs don't self-destruct.	♦♦♦♦
PS2, XBOX	DEC	ALIAS Jennifer Garner can kick our butt anytime.	♦♦♦♦
PC, XBOX	DEC	MAX PAYNE 2 Hardcore badass and purpler prosed.	♦♦♦♦
PC	DEC	THE SIMS BUSTIN' OUT Bust it!	♦♦♦♦
PS2	JAN	GRAN TURISMO 4 Keep your hand on the e-brake.	♦♦♦♦
XBOX	JAN	FABLE Tell us a story, grandpa.	♦♦♦♦
GBA	JAN	RIVER CITY RANSOM Punching and kicking all over again.	♦♦♦♦
PS2, XBOX	JAN	MAFIA In the '30s, they killed people to jazz music.	♦♦♦♦

DEPARTURES OUT NOW

SYSTEM	TITLE	GMR SCORE
PS2	SSX 3 What's cooler than being cool? Ice cold!	9 ¹⁰
GC, PC, PS2, XBOX	TIGER WOODS 2004 Golf and hip-hop, together at last.	9 ¹⁰
GC	VIEWTUFUL JOE Hey Joe, where you gon' in that crazy outfit?	9 ¹⁰
GC, PC, PS2, XBOX	WARHAMMER 40K: FIRE WARRIOR Enlist in the space marines today.	8 ¹⁰
PS2, XBOX	NASCAR THUNDER 2004 Thunder isn't God bowling, it's Jesus driving NASCAR.	8 ¹⁰
XBOX	OUNGEONS & ORAGONS HEROES We tried playing, but the 2D-sides die wouldn't fit in the disc tray.	8 ¹⁰
PC	LIONHEART: LEGACY OF THE CRUSAADER More like the heart of a kitten.	4 ¹⁰
PC	REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION This is why we don't vote.	5 ¹⁰
XBOX	DINO CRISIS 3 Who knew getting eaten by a dinosaur would be so dull?	5 ¹⁰
PS2	LETHAL SKIES II We must have been inverted.	6 ¹⁰
PS2	JAK II You know what they say about guys with big ears...	8 ¹⁰
PS2	TIME CRISIS 3 Bust a cap. A light cap.	7 ¹⁰
GC, PS2, XBOX	WALLACE & GROMIT: PROJECT ZOO Cracking good game, Gromit!	7 ¹⁰
PS2	MEGA MAN X7 When will that little boy outgrow that armor?	7 ¹⁰
XBOX	HUNTER: THE RECKONING - REOEMEER We reckon the Hunter games are getting better.	7 ¹⁰
GC	WRESTLEMANIA XIX It's fake, you know. And Santa Claus is dead.	7 ¹⁰

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RATING PENDING



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XBOX
KNOWLEDGETHEY KNOW STUFF SO YOU
DON'T HAVE TO!

EVAN SHAMOON

KONICHI WA
XBOX

➔ Having just returned from the Tokyo Game Show, I'm happy to report that it appears the pace is picking up for Xbox in Japan. While it's still emphatically clear that Sony's PS2 owns the lion's share of the market land, hence, the attention of the development community, Xbox is finally being embraced by more of the country's most talented developers.

From Software's Xbox-exclusive *Oni 2*, for example, looks positively brilliant. The original game caught many U.S. gamers by surprise, and the sequel is a deeper, more sophisticated experience that should appeal to an even larger scope of gamers, thanks to a more accessible control interface.

Microsoft's own *True Fantasy Live Online* continues to impress, combining feature-film-quality visuals with what appears to be the most customizable massively multiplayer experience ever created. A hands-on with Tecmo's *Ninja Gaiden* confirms that the game represents the apex of third-person action-style game mechanics, while Capcom's *Steel Battalion: Line of Contact* brings the groundbreaking 40-button-controller-viewing mecha ops online. **B+**

—Evan Shamoon is Editor-in-Chief of Xbox Nation.

THE EMPIRE
STRIKES JADE

WHAT'S UP, BIOWARE?

CANADA

➔ The doctors of fun at BioWare crept up behind the games industry at the recent Tokyo Game Show and stuck it in the neck with a syringe full of wow.

Maxim-style intro paragraphs aside, the Xbox-exclusive adventure-RPG *Jade Empire* looks about a thousand times better than the epic *KOTOR* in the graphics department,

and will boast real-time arcade-style combat and one of the most visually stunning and beautifully realized worlds yet seen in a videogame. The early video and screens reveal a labor of love (set in ancient China) so detailed and atmospheric that it will leave you gasping for breath, in need, perhaps, of a doctor. **A-**



More info at <http://jade.bioware.com>

[SCREEN]

RELOADED-ED

WAKE US WHEN IT'S OVER

RATED R | 130 MINUTES | 2 DISCS | DIRECTED BY THE WACHOWSKI BROTHERS

➔ If *The Matrix Reloaded* achieved anything, it reminded us just how excellent the first movie is compared to this overreaching sequel. The original *Matrix*, with its minuscule budget and innovative yet low-tech special effects, revealed in its economy, delivering maximum bang for the buck with minimal waste. The sequel is a hemorrhaging beast by comparison. While an army of *Matrix* fans dissected the myriad Biblical and historical references buried in the characters, ships, and locations, we simply gritted our teeth as we sat through repeated *Reloaded* viewings. In the rare moments when Neo wasn't sucking face with Trinity, Morpheus was either blathering on about the prophecies (boring!) or giving his milk-curdling "I Have a Dream" speech to a cavern full of illogically sexy ravers/resistance fighters.

But, of course, all is forgiven when the Wachowski brothers so benevolently



deliver unto us what we have come to see: the fight scenes. And yet, even these feel tacked on and obligatory. "You don't really know someone until you fight them," blurts the Oracle's spiky-haired bodyguard. Bite me. Even the highly touted burly brawl reeks of the stench of utter futility.

Special features: The double-set DVD, which fans will purchase like lemmings, contains an anatomy of the "mind-blowing chase scene" and other less compelling stuff. Save us, *Revolutions!* **B+**

PLAYSTATION
KNOWLEDGETHEY KNOW STUFF SO YOU
DON'T HAVE TO!

JOHN DAVISON

WHO'S
NUMBER ONE?

➔ Every year, it's clear what the "really big" game will be. Last year, we all knew that *Vice City* was going to be bigger than *Jesus* and that *Final Fantasy X* would be similarly huge, though with a much different audience.

But this year, who knows what the "really big" game is going to be? Looking at the release schedule, we can tell there are going to be some big hits...but which one is the leader? *Return of the King* will be a big seller, as will *NFS: Underground*, *Ratchet & Clank: SCoOM* II, and *THUG*. But are any of them going to be this year's GTA? No. Even this year's big Square game, *Final Fantasy X-2*, is meeting a more subdued reaction than usual. Generally, everyone falls over themselves to give the praises of a new *Fantasy*, but many people doubt this one will have the same impact as previous titles in the series. It will surely sell a ton, but it's potentially "just another million seller" this time, rather than the competition crusher the franchise usually is.

Is this good news or bad? It probably means that games are now even more like movies. In the grand scheme of things, 10 games that each sell a million copies is probably better than one game that sells 4 million. It's not as exciting, though, is it? **B+**

—John Davison is Editor-in-Chief of the Official U.S. *PlayStation Magazine*.

GMR CHARTS

TOP-SELLING GAMES FOR EVERY SYSTEM FOR SEPTEMBER 03

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JEFF GREEN

GO SHORTY

➔ I hate the PC. No, not really. I love it. Well, not love love, like I want to marry it. But I sure enjoy having it around. That said, it's making me mad lately, because as I gear up for the holiday releases, I realize there are still, like, 20 games on my hard drive I haven't finished, plus a huge pile of new ones I haven't even installed yet. It's too much dang pressure. I might be the one person on Earth happy for the *Half-Life 2* delay—it means I can catch up on my older stuff.

For instance, I'm finally finishing *Baldur's Gate 2*. Yeah, I know—that game is ancient. But it's huge! I put in 80 hours before getting out of Chapter 2. That's not a complaint in this case, because it's such a great game. But I do think, as my wife constantly reminds me, that size isn't everything. I'd much rather play an awesome, focused 12-hour game than a bloated, mediocre 100-hour one.

Fears that upcoming titles like *Max Payne 2* are going to be too short fall on deaf ears with me. The original *Half-Life* wasn't long at all. But every moment ruled. *Halo* could take out half those repeated corridors and still have a great game.

Here's one vote for shorter, better games. Life's too short for bloated mediocrity.

JE Jeff Green is Editor-in-Chief of *Computer Gaming World* magazine.

TOP 10 ALL FORMATS

RANK	TITLE	FORMAT	SCORE
01	 FINAL FANTASY TACTICS ADV. It's all part of my strategy fantasy.	GBA	9
02	 MADDEN NFL 2004 Overrated? Nah, we're just going to keep our mouths shut.	PS2	9
03	 ESPN NFL FOOTBALL Now with 100 percent less social commentary.	XB	8
04	 TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2004 Yes, you're reading this correctly. Golf more popular than wrestling.	PS2	9
05	 SOUL CALIBUR II Do you realize how difficult it is to write six <i>Soul Calibur II</i> captions in two months?	GC	9
06	 SOUL CALIBUR II Do you?	PS2	9
07	 STAR WARS: JEDI ACADEMY We flunked out after showing up to lightsaber class with a hangover.	PC	7
08	 WWE RAW 2 Should have cooked it a li'l more, then.	XB	5
09	 ESPN NFL FOOTBALL Good to see <i>ESPN</i> getting the attention it deserves.	PS2	8
10	 SOUL CALIBUR II We don't think you do.	XB	9

PS2 TOP 10

	SCORE
01 MADDEN NFL 2004	9
02 TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2004	9
03 SOUL CALIBUR II	9
04 ESPN NFL FOOTBALL	8
05 NASCAR THUNDER 2004	8
06 DISGAEA HOUR OF DARKNESS	8
07 NHL 2004	8
08 THE SIMPSONS: HIT 'N' RUN	8
09 SOCOM	9
10 ESPN NHL HOCKEY	8

XBOX TOP 10

	SCORE
01 ESPN NFL FOOTBALL	8
02 WWE RAW 2	5
03 SOUL CALIBUR II	9
04 TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2004	9
05 MADDEN NFL 2004	9
06 D&O HEROES	6
07 ESPN NHL HOCKEY	8
08 THE SIMPSONS: HIT 'N' RUN	8
09 NASCAR THUNDER 2004	8
10 GHOST RECON: ISLAND THUNDER	7

PC TOP 10


	SCORE
01 STAR WARS: JEDI ACADEMY	7
02 EQ: LOST DUNGEONS	TBD
03 BF 1942: SECRET WEAPONS	8
04 TEMPLE OF ELEMENTAL EVIL	TBD
05 C&C GENERALS: ZERO HOUR	TBD
06 HOMEWORLD 2	8
07 MOH AA: BREAKTHROUGH	TBD
08 AQ: SHADOWLANDS	TBD
09 SIM CITY 4: RUSH HOUR	TBD
10 WC 3: THE FROZEN THRONE	8

GBA TOP 10

	SCORE
01 FINAL FANTASY TACTICS ADV.	9
02 POKÉMON PINBALL	7
03 BOKTAI	8
04 POKÉMON RUBY	7
05 DBZ: LEGACY OF GOKU II	7
06 DONKEY KONG COUNTRY	6
07 POKÉMON SAPPHIRE	7
08 SMA4: SUPER MARIO BROS. 3	9
09 ADVANCE WARS 2	8
10 GOLDEN SUN: THE LOST AGE	8

GC TOP 10

	SCORE
01 SOUL CALIBUR II	9
02 WWE WRESTLEMANIA XIX	7
03 F-ZERO GX	9
04 THE SIMPSONS: HIT 'N' RUN	8
05 MADDEN NFL 2004	9
06 BILLY HATCHER & THE GIANT EGG	8
07 MARIO GOLF	9
08 SUPER SMASH BROS. MELEE	9
09 P.N.03	4
10 TIGER WOODS 2004	9



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STORM
OF THE CENTURY
A FILM BY JAMES HANNA

[TALENT]

* KEN LEVINE

SAVING THE WORLD FROM EVIL

➔ Ken Levine of Irrational Games knows what PC gamers like: his games. Aside from being the lead designer for *System Shock 2*—an absolute classic that's on almost every gamer's all-time favorite list—Ken also produced and wrote *Freedom Force*, the campy '60s comic-book-themed strategy game. Currently, he's working on scripts for the new *Tribes* game for Vivendi and *Freedom Force's* follow-up, *Freedom Force vs. The Third Reich*. We checked in with him to see how that's going:

GMR: *Freedom Force vs. The Third Reich* concentrates on the WWII era. What's so appealing about that era?

KL: There was something extremely black-and-white about that period that's very exciting. The good guys were good guys, and the bad guys [were] Nazis. What's great about bringing the *Freedom Force* characters there is that as they're developing as characters and become less black-and-white—they stand out in stark contrast to the enemies they face.

GMR: War comics from the '40s could be racially charged. How will *Freedom Force vs. The Third Reich* deal with those images and attitudes without being offensive?

KL: *Freedom Force* is always done in the spirit of fun. It's clearly a fantasy. While we won't have any buck-toothed caricatures for the Japanese, the Axis villains will certainly be villains. Our goal is not a philosophical re-examination of the various political and ideological structures during the Second World War, but it's also not about reflecting any of the racial stereotypes of the period, whether they be European, Asian, or African American.

GMR: How do you guys come up with characters and their superpowers?

KL: A bunch of different ways. Sometimes, I'll have an idea for a character and bring it to Robb Waters, our concept artist, who will take my sketchy thoughts and turn them into fully realized characters. Other times, Robb will bring a visual concept of a character to me, and I might offer some ideas to move the character one way or another. It's pretty collaborative, but I have the easy part; Robb's got to do all the drawing. Trust me, you don't want me doing the drawing.

Once the character's look and vibe are defined, we talk to Jon Chey, Dorian Hart, and Andrew Smith—who are designing the actual game mechanics—and they come up



with superpowers to expand on and develop the persona that Robb and I have hashed out.

GMR: What era are you planning to cover for the next installment?

KL: Since I've already wrongly predicted which era we'd cover in an *FF* sequel once, I think I'll just keep my mouth shut on this.

GMR: Any plans to do anything else with the *Freedom Force* characters? Movies? An actual comic book, perhaps?

KL: Lots of things talked about, nothing firm yet.

GMR: Who's your all-time favorite comic-book character?

KL: I'm so boring.

Spiderman or Batman. Though I'm falling deeper and deeper in love with Jessica Jones in Bendis' *Alias* book (not to be confused with the TV show of the same name). In terms of villains, it's Angelus from *Buffy*, which, despite being a TV show, is actually a comic book in structure and plot structure.

Am I a nerd, or what? ☹

Step into the boots of a SEAL team in *SOCOM II: U.S. NAVY SEALs* and face the ultimate challenge: urban combat.



Developed in association with the U.S. Navy SEALs, *SOCOM II* is close-quarters combat at its most realistic. Invisible snipers lay in wait. Enemies lurk around every corner. And every civilian could be a friend or foe. Stealth is your greatest weapon.



Wage urban war in single-player mode. Or go online and play with and against up to 16 total players. Either way, a *SOCOM*-compatible headset will help you communicate and work together as a team. Remember, together you stand. Divided you don't stand a chance.



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PLAY IN OURS.™

PlayStation 2



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NINTENDO KNOWLEDGE

THEY KNOW STUFF SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO!



PHIL THEOBALD

NINTENDO?

➔ I recently returned from TGS and, as

expected, Nintendo was a no-show. Sure, there was a brief mention of the company at the show's keynote speech, but Nintendo didn't even bother setting up a booth to show off its games.

Even the mention at the keynote wasn't all that exciting—Nintendo announced that it will be remaking the two original

Pokémon games for GBA. Kind of interesting, yes, and they will sell a ton of them, but re-releasing a hit game on an already successful system doesn't help the current problem: The GameCube isn't selling in Japan.

The recent price drop in the United States has increased system sales, but Nintendo is still reporting a

loss (to the tune of 3 billion yen—around \$30 million) for the first half of this fiscal year. It's the company's first loss since 1962.

I don't know Nintendo's logic for never showing up at TGS, but if it wants to sell GameCubes, it needs to be more forthcoming with upcoming releases.

☹ Phil Theobald is Reviews Editor at GameZone.

GAMEPLANNER NOVEMBER 2003

LET US GIVE THANKS FOR WHAT WE ARE ABOUT TO RECEIVE

RU: RELEASE DATES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE. SD IT'S NOT OUR FAULT!

SUNDAY

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY



01



02

Get your week off to a bang with the new King for all consoles and PC, as well as the Fire Emblem for GBA. On Lord!

04

Get your week off to a bang with the new King for all consoles and PC, as well as the Fire Emblem for GBA. On Lord!

06

Get your week off to a bang with the new King for all consoles and PC, as well as the Fire Emblem for GBA. On Lord!

08

Get your week off to a bang with the new King for all consoles and PC, as well as the Fire Emblem for GBA. On Lord!

07

Get your week off to a bang with the new King for all consoles and PC, as well as the Fire Emblem for GBA. On Lord!

08



09

Ready to shop? Baldur's Gate: The Complete Campaign is out for PC. Baldur's Gate: The Complete Campaign is out for PC. Baldur's Gate: The Complete Campaign is out for PC.

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Ready to shop? Baldur's Gate: The Complete Campaign is out for PC. Baldur's Gate: The Complete Campaign is out for PC. Baldur's Gate: The Complete Campaign is out for PC.

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Ready to shop? Baldur's Gate: The Complete Campaign is out for PC. Baldur's Gate: The Complete Campaign is out for PC. Baldur's Gate: The Complete Campaign is out for PC.

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"The newly announced return of Hunter: The Reckoning, in the form of Hunter: The Reckoning Redeemer, has us pretty damn excited."

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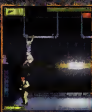
Blood and Gore
Violence

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XBOX PLAYSTATION 2 NINTENDO GAMECUBE

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Violence



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PlayStation 2



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Mild Violence



PlayStation 2



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INCOMING GAMES PREVIEWED



PREVIEWED THIS ISSUE:

LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE	PS2/MB	0.4.7
DRAGON SKIES: HIGH ROAD TO REVENGE	XB	0.4.8
BROKEN SWORD II: THE SLEEPING DRAGON	PC/PS2/MB	0.4.8
UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004	PC	0.4.8
DRAKE	PC/MB	0.4.8
MISSION IMPOSSIBLE: OPERATION SURMA	GC/PS2/MB	0.5.0
SPY HUNTER 2	GC/PS2/MB	0.5.0
DRAGONBALL Z: BUDOKAI 2	PS2	0.5.0
WARD WARE GC	GC	0.5.0
KING OF FIGHTERS 2000/2001	PS2	0.5.1
COUNTER-STRIKE	XB	0.5.1
SPY VS. SPY	PS2	0.5.1
CRASH NITRO KART	GC/PS2/MB	0.5.2
GRADIUS V	PS2	0.5.2
KILLER 7	GC	0.5.2
BREAKDOWN	XB	0.5.3
MAXIMO VS. ARMY OF ZIN	PS2	0.5.3



WARNING!

HAZARDOUS MATERIAL

Here at GMR, we preview games a little differently. To ensure that our previews are as relevant as possible, we only feature titles that will be released within six months. We also record our level of excitement about the game with cool little flames. Previews are not reviews—they're merely a guide as to how good a game-in-progress is looking. It's a snapshot. If we're not very excited by it, the game receives one or two flames. If we're taking a wait-and-see attitude, expect to see three flames. Over and above that, you can bet we're pretty excited. It's our duty to tell you what we think at every stage of a game's development cycle—positive, negative, or somewhere in between.



→ Kain and Raziel still aren't on the best of terms, but you control both vampires during two intertwining quests. Kain fights with his sword and telekinetics, while Raziel sucks souls with gusto and swaps between physical and spirit worlds at will. Raziel's new transition animation is a killer—he sinks into the earth and climbs out of his grave and into the other world.

RELEASE | NOVEMBER

LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE

DEVELOPER PS2XBOX CRYSTAL DYNAMICS

MAKE THE SCENE

➔ The world of Nosgoth hasn't changed much in the latest *Legacy of Kain*, but how you look at it has. The new scene-focused camera, which replaces *Soul Reaver*'s character-focused style, changes everything.

Rather than following behind Kain or Raziel's back, the camera is now fixed in each scene. It's just like *Devil May Cry*'s camera, and it causes some familiar problems if following Dante's movements gives you a headache. Scene transitions can be messy, since the definition of "forward" abruptly changes, requiring a quick jiggle of the analog stick to get things moving properly again. Other areas make

depth perception difficult, such as when you're trying to judge the distance and direction of a jump along an axis where the relative positioning of onscreen objects isn't clear.

On the other hand, this scheme has distinct advantages, mainly in the aesthetic department. It displays environments as the designers intended—the game's complex architecture and detailed textures stand out. The game world is as expansive as *Soul Reaver 2*'s, but the sense of scale is even more impressive. The wider view also makes fighting multiple opponents easier, so Kain can carve through squads of foes

with ease while quickly switching between targets.

The controls enable the player to make moves in quick succession: You can slash one bad guy, suck the blood of another, and telekinetically toss their best friend off a bridge. Like *Devil May Cry*, there are two ways to fight. You can focus on one opponent and strafe accordingly, which works when a particular enemy needs to go first, or you can trust the automatic positioning and hack away at a larger group of foes. That control aspect is well in hand at this point, and Kain's psychokinetic powers allow fights to spread across a large area without slowing down. If the

bad guys run away, it's easy to yank them back into range with a deft touch of mind power.

If Crystal can nail down the camera control, everything else will fall into place, and most of the issues in the current version should be easy enough to tune. Once the scene transitions are smoothed out and the camera is freed up to follow the character more clearly, *Defiance*'s fast action will most certainly be a welcome change from years of shoving boxes around. **B+**

GMA SAYS → It's something different for Crystal, but change is good, and what hasn't changed is the game's soul-sucking fun.

→ HOW HOT...



RELEASE | NOVEMBER

CRIMSON SKIES

System: XB Developer: MICROSOFT

Publisher: MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS

WE'LL TAKE THE HIGH ROAD

➔ Even slick graphics couldn't make Microsoft's dry *Flight Simulator* series Xbox worthy. And after Sony's *Sky Gunner*, does the world really need another steam-punk-revisionist 1930s-era flying shooter?

Yes. The new *Crimson Skies* is not your daddy's dogfighting game. By ditching sim-style realism in favor of fast action and benchmark-setting visuals, Microsoft has made even Namco's newest *Ace Combat* seem crotchety. *Crimson's* controls recall the responsiveness and intuitive simplicity of addictive arcade games, letting you excitedly shake out of engine stalls as easily as you target planes and zeppelins with fatal machine-gun fire.

Though the old-movie-themed one-player game is compelling, what really wins us over are *Crimson's* cooperative and competitive modes, which should finally make multiplayer dogfighting worthwhile for console owners. **👉**

GMA SAYS → While keeping *High Road to Revenge* squarely in our sights...

➔ **HOW HOT...** 🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥



RELEASE | NOVEMBER

BROKEN SWORD III: TSD

System: PC/PS2/XB Developer: DREAMCATCHER Publisher: REVOLUTION SOFTWARE

THE DRAGON SLEEPS TONIGHT

➔ In today's ultramodern world of multigenre hybrids and high-intensity actioners, titles with strong ties to the past are a rarity. However, with its solid 3D engine and a considerable cult following to back it up, Revolution Software's third installment in the famed *Broken Sword* franchise may revitalize the adventure category.

Dubbed *The Sleeping Dragon*, the third *Broken Sword* aims for the old-school point-and-click audience. Sporting a heap of dialogue, cutting-edge visuals, and plot-heavy explanations, Revolution's primary

focus is to successfully capture the spirit of a once-mighty genre while moving forward in terms of technology and control.

Sleeping Dragon will offer circumstantial action buttons and a host of mind-twisting puzzles. Players should also be on the lookout for plenty of references to the earlier games in the *Broken Sword* franchise, as well as a witty, humorous subplot. You gotta love the humorous subplots. **👉**

GMA SAYS → Adventure games are few and far between these days. That's a shame.

➔ **HOW HOT...** 🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥



RELEASE | NOVEMBER

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

System: PC Publisher: ACTIVISION Developer: EPIC

UNREALITY CHECK

➔ The next installment in this futuristic death-sport-themed first-person-shooter franchise will be upon us faster than you say "redeemer."

Unreal Tournament 2004 offers much more than the paltry graphics upgrade that characterizes many games iterated yearly, in addition to all-new technologies (such as improved computer-controlled bots and optimized network code), there are actually new game types—or should we say old. Assault mode, a favorite from the original *UT* that was left out of *UT 2003*, is back and better than ever. And a new mode called Onslaught that's geared toward smaller groups of gamers—just you and a few buddies—takes advantage of *UT 2004's* most

extreme new addition: vehicles. Land-, air-, and space-based rides at your disposal should accelerate the action to new heights. Throw in new weapons, maps, and the mod support that's been the series'

hallmark, and you've got the best *UT* ever. Until next year, that is... **👉**

GMA SAYS → More bigger. More better. You wanted it, you've got it.

➔ **HOW HOT...** 🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥



DRAKE

System: PC/PS2 Publisher: HAJEKO Developer: IDOL FX

Is it Max Payne for kids? A Japanese cartoon-influenced third-person title with purpley? Or just another Hong Kong action game with as much Asian authenticity as a food court Panda Express? *Drake* is all of these things, but some of its neighborhood 3D stages could turn out well if its fluid controls and off-kilter camera angles are fixed before release. We'll keep our fingers crossed.

RELEASE | OCTOBER



SHIFT INTO
SOMETHING
MORE LETHAL

40 MIDWAY



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- IGN

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PlayStation 2



Violence

RELEASE | NOVEMBER

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE: OP SURMA

DEVELOPER: GPC/2008 PUBLISHER: ATARI DEVELOPER: PARADIGM

GOOD MORNING, MR. HUNT

➔ Accept this mission and become top IMF agent Ethan Hunt, whose Bond-like combination of style, action, and gadget use made *Mission Impossible* a blockbuster Hollywood franchise.

Unlike with the next installment of *Bond* games, don't expect to be playing as Tom Cruise; this Ethan bears little resemblance to the short actor. With *Mi: Operation Surma*, Paradigm plans to create an

original third-person action game that successfully captures the spytastic feel of the movies.

Based on stopping the Surma Corporation from unleashing its ICEWorm virus, the cinematic story is also timely, reflecting recent actual events concerning computer worms. Naturally, an impressive array of the series' signature gadgets proves invaluable in this high-tech setting. Equally useful are Ethan's stealth abilities: infiltrating buildings and making silent takedowns will feel familiar to veterans of similar games and will likely be just as enjoyable. **B+**

GMA SAYS → We hope this one doesn't self-destruct in five seconds.

→ HOW HOT... 🔥🔥🔥



RELEASE | NOVEMBER

DBZ: BUDOKAI 2

DEVELOPER: PS2 PUBLISHER: ATARI DEVELOPER: CNMP

GOING BALLS OUT

➔ Not until last year's *Dragon Ball Z: Budokai* did the exceedingly, even excessively, popular anime series become something more than a half-assed third-rate imported-from-Japan fighting title. Because of requests from fans, *Budokai 2* smartly builds upon the original for yet another *DBZ* release fans can be proud of.

The addition of cel-shading works wonderfully. The technique truly accentuates *Dragon Ball Z* creator Akira Toriyama's distinct art style—whether that's good or bad depends on your artistic inclinations.

Single-player gamers are in for a treat with *Budokai 2*'s *Dragon* mode, which carries players from the World Games to the Kid Buu arcs of the *DBZ* saga. It's structured like a board game, so characters are allowed a set number of moves each turn. Move to a space occupied by an enemy, and a battle commences. Upgrades and money to spend at the skills shop are scattered throughout each board. *DBZ* fans, start charging up. **B+**

GMA SAYS → It's kinda like *Soul Calibur* II, but for *DBZ* fans. Kinda.

→ HOW HOT... 🔥🔥🔥

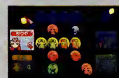


WARIO WARE GC

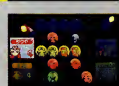
DEVELOPER: GC DEVELOPER: NINTENDO DEVELOPER: NINTENDO

Consumer alert! The suits at Nintendo are recalling their popular *Wario* product, citing a 94 percent lack of multiplayer mayhem. Affected customers are advised to visit Nintendo for the upcoming domestic version of *Wario Ware*, which will not only feature other recruits with multiplayer support, but also brand-new microgames designed specifically for GC and its four controller ports.

RELEASE | WINTER



→ HOW HOT... 🔥🔥🔥



INCOMING GAMES

king of fighters 2000/2001 → counter strike → spy vs spy

RELEASE | NOVEMBER

KING OF FIGHTERS 2000 & 2001

SYSTEM PS2 PUBLISHER SNK USA DEVELOPER SNK PLAYMORE

DREAM MATCH NEVER ENDS

➔ For the dedicated fans of SNK's 2D fighters, this is the best deal for the money since...ever: *KOF 2000* and *KOF 2001* on one PS2 disc for 40 bucks. They may dispute which of the nine annual team-based fighters is really the best one, but they'll still lay their money down.

2000 and 2001 bridge the gap between the series' old days and the new—2000 was the last one developed by the original SNK, while 2001 came from new developer Eolith. For hardcore fighters, the juxtaposition should make obsessive analysis of minute differences in gameplay easier, and more casual players should just enjoy getting this much fighting in a single package.

The double pack will have all the extras from the Japanese versions, including the survival-style Party mode and a gallery of art and movies. On top of that,

SNK is packing in new Striker characters exclusive to the U.S. versions of both games, which should help make up for the long wait. **B+**

GMA SAYS → Add frames if you're an SNK fan—it's been a long time since *KOF* has come home

→ HOW HOT...



RELEASE | NOVEMBER

COUNTER-STRIKE

SYSTEM XB PUBLISHER MICROSOFT DEVELOPER VALVE

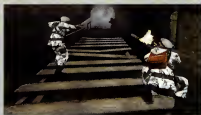
WHAT WAS OLD IS NEW AGAIN

➔ We didn't realize that this was *Counter-Strike* at first. Why? 'Cause the game is looking too damn good on Xbox. Not to bag on the original PC version, but c'mon, it's based on the 5-year-old *Half-Life* engine. For this major face-lift, you're getting 20 maps (featuring seven Xbox exclusives and a couple of classics, like *Dust*). More are on the way through *Xbox Live*, but the ones we've seen are packed with details.

Developer Valve is even adding little touches that will affect the tried-and-true gameplay: walk out of a dark corridor into the sun, and your eyes need to adjust to the glare; a grenade goes off nearby, and your ears ring for a few seconds. By "borrowing" the silky-smooth controls from *Halo*, it's gonna be easy for you to blow away 15 other guys online. So suit up and prepare to kick some ass. **B+**

GMA SAYS → You're looking at the one game that'll bring *Xbox Live* to its knees

→ HOW HOT...



→ HOW HOT...



SPY VS. SPY

SYSTEM PS2 PUBLISHER TDK MEDIANEVE DEVELOPER WAY FORWARD

One of the brightest jewels in Med magazine's comedy crown, *Spy vs. Spy*'s stylized hand-drawn hedgepodge of humor and violence predates *Itchy* and *Scratchy* by nearly 30 years. Plenty of games have pit perpetual antagonists *Black Spy* and *White Spy* against one another over the years; this one features action for up to four players as they outlast, outwit, and outbodytrap their way across 12 levels.



RELEASE | Q1 2004

GET STOKED!

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Chris Carle
Editor in Chief IGN Guides/
IGN Codes-IGN.com

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RELEASE | SPRING 04

GRADIUS V

DEV: KONAMI PS2 PUBLISHER: KONAMI DEVELOPER: KONAMI

DEATH TO ALL EASTER ISLAND HEADS

➔ The latest word on the newest *Gradius* shooter should calm a common fear among E3 attendees—no, the game will not be psychopathically hard. The demo shown in May was visually superb, but also so difficult that only a dedicated masochist could have enjoyed it for long. Now, Konami says the final product will be tuned for beginners and experts alike, so same shooter fans may breathe a sigh of relief.

Disappointed comes in the form of a brief delay, though. The Japanese version will arrive by the end of the year, but *V's* American release is now scheduled for Q1 2004. The holiday rush is a rough time for niche titles, though, so it's a reasonable decision on Konami's part. In the meantime, look forward to seven stages reviving classic themes from *Gradius* past, as well as a new Option Control system, offering more control than the familiar satellite weapons. If it's kinder than the E3 version, this will easily be the best *Gradius* yet. **E+**

GMA SAYS ➔ If you like *Gradius*, you'll love this. And if you don't, you should learn to.

➔ **HOW HOT...** 🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥

RELEASE | NOVEMBER

CRASH NITRO KART

DEV: NINTENDO GAMES BOY ADVANCE PUBLISHER: NINTENDO DEVELOPER: NINTENDO

FAMILIAR RACES. PRETTIER FACES

➔ Having preserved the dignity of the flagging *Crash Bandicoot* franchise with two solid Game Boy Advance titles, Vicarious Visions has been invited to work on its first nonportable *Crash*. Unfortunately, it has the task of producing a follow-up to the 1999 megahit *Crash Team Racing* and Naughty Dog's kiss-off to the franchise that made it famous.

So how do you follow up greatness? By making pretty much the same game with audiovisual enhancements. *Crash Nitro Kart* has an arena "editor" that lets you lay down a customized pattern of power-up crates, but otherwise, it's just a really pretty *Crash Team Racing*, with the powersliding and ramp-jumping play mechanics that made it the best kart racer on PS1. It's kid-tested, mother-approved gameplay. **E+**

GMA SAYS ➔ Any GameCube owner with a double-digit IQ will totally kick this kart. For the future classic *Double Dash!!*, but this is the only real option for kart-racing PS2 and Xbox owners.

➔ **HOW HOT...** 🔥 🔥

KILLER 7

DEV: CAPCOM DC PUBLISHER: CAPCOM DEVELOPER: CAPCOM

New details about Capcom's superstylin', surprisingly bloody action game have emerged from Japan: Former assassin Herman Smith, now wheelchair-bound, is afflicted by multiple personalities, "characters" who each possess different abilities (stealthiness, invisibility, disorientation, etc.), whose stories are told over five different story lines and two arcs. Expect them to intertwine, as multiple stories often tend to do.

RELEASE | Q1 04

➔ **HOW HOT...** 🔥 🔥 🔥 🔥

RELEASE 1 FEBRUARY 04

BREAKDOWN

SYSTEM 70 PUBLISHED NAMCO PUBLISHED NAMCO

SEE THE WORLD THROUGH NEW EYES

➤ *Namco's Breakdown* may use a first-person perspective with as much skill as anything ever seen. *Metroid Prime* did a fine job of ensconcing players behind Samus Aran's visor, but *Breakdown* goes one step further, putting them right inside her Derrick Cole's head. As he shoots, drives, fights hand-to-hand with glowing-eyeb genetic mistakes, and even simply cracks open a can of soda, the game does an almost eerily perfect job of following his point of view. The "camera," as it were, bobs and dips in a way that reminds us of how artificial most first-person perspectives are.

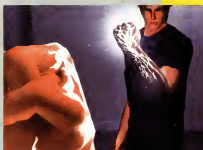
That distinctive detail makes *Breakdown* more interesting than it otherwise might be. First-person shooters are a dime a dozen on Xbox, even with graphics this good, but nothing has shown off the

GMA SAYS → A near-unknown quantity with tremendous potential

→ HOW HOT...



same immersive perspective, especially blended with melee combat. If it does what its creators say it can—producer and *Time Crisis*'s veteran Hirofumi Kami plans to rival the blockbusters of both games and film—*Breakdown* may put players behind gaming's most famous new face. **E**



RELEASE | FEBRUARY 04

MAXIMO VS. ARMY OF ZIN

SYSTEM: PS2 PUBLISHER: CAPCOM DEVELOPER: CAPCOM PRODUCTION STUDIO 2

DEATH WEARS ARMORED BOXER SHORTS

➔ It's hard not to get stoked about a game with armored boxer shorts. Sword-slinging Maximo has successive armor levels, just like the hero of the *Ghouls 'n' Ghosts* side-scrollers, and building them up grants more resistance to damage and special abilities. But the pinnacle, golden armor, takes some extra effort to snag. For the best protection possible, Maximo has to buy the critical part of the ensemble: armored undies.

The quirky humor and nostalgic hooks that put the original *Maximo* on the map thus are in full effect. There's more to *Army of Zin* than that, though—its level design is a big step ahead.

While the first game featured enclosed static levels, the sequel mixes things up with longer, more linear levels, seasoned with scripted events, so there's more of a progression, as well as sudden

shocks, for shifting the tone of combat.

If the challenges facing him are more complex, Maximo has more ways to strike back. Army of Zin's combat system combines multiple attack types for a bigger hand-to-hand combo tree and adds a combo meter to rack up bigger bonuses in intense fights.

The big question mark is its looks. *Army of Zin* isn't close to the top of the PS2 graphical heap, although Susumu Matsushita's artwork goes a long way toward offsetting the relatively simple modeling and lighting. Serious platform fans should be able to look past that and enjoy what *Maximo* has in spades: classic action. **B+**

GMA SAYS → It's not a technical powerhouse like *Jak II*, but *Army of Two*'s got solid mechanics and a retro cool style

→ HOW HOT...



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MYSTERY MAN

BROKEN SWORD'S CHARLES CECIL COMMUNICATES WITH
GMR USING ONLY POINTING AND CLICKING

➔ Charles Cecil is a true believer: When the world told him that the point-and-click adventure game was as dead as the DeLorean, he duly moved his mouse over the laugh icon and clicked. The genre had already been more than good to him and his studio, Revolution Software, thanks to robust sales of such titles as *Beneath a Steel Sky* and *Lure of the Temptress*. By 1996, however, even the most ardent supporter of the point-and-click, LucasArts, was moving away from the genre and embracing 3D action games.

Believing in the unique storytelling ability of the once ubiquitous genre, Cecil stuck to his guns and produced the PC best-seller *Broken Sword*. Defying the industry yet again, he followed it up with a sequel. Now, some five years after the last *Broken Sword* game, he's back with a highly fashionable 3D version. *Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon* is previewed on page 48 of this issue. Charles Cecil, international man of mystery, is interviewed here...

GMR: What caused the demise of the point-and-click?

CC: With point-and-click games, a grammar was developed; a grammar understood by those who knew the games, but found a little impenetrable by those who didn't. The people who played them a lot demanded, as time went on, that the puzzles become more and more difficult, but in doing that, they became more and more obscure, and people who didn't know this grammar stopped playing because the idea of taking an ironing board and turning it into a surfboard was so ludicrous, so obscure, that it meant nothing. It was self-referential. So part of the reason we had this decline is that the games moved further and further down a very specific route and alienated more and more people who didn't understand that grammar. The games became frustrating, and to a certain extent, they had to because you had to stop people from progressing too fast. Our puzzles now still challenge you, but they're not nearly as obscure. They make sense. In a 3D environment, you put in the extra gameplay elements. In the beginning, for example, you drag a box around—boxes are great, a generic feature that goes beyond the "find object, use object time-limit" structure of the point-and-clicks.

GMR: Why has it been five years since the last *Broken Sword* game?

CC: After the point-and-click, there was a vacuum, desperately aware for where our next big thing was. It happened in a number of genres—sometimes it's a pretty successful and sometimes it's not.

I felt very strongly after *Broken Sword 2*, so it was vital to deliver something that not only was 3D, but also used the 3D to improve upon the gameplay. If we were going to do one, it had to look as good and as detailed in 3D as it did in 2D, and that's why we didn't do this for a number of years. We wanted to wait until the technology was there to deliver a particular look. We very much set out to write an epic game.

GMR: During that time, LucasArts, arguably your biggest direct competitor, produced a 3D version of *Monkey Island*. Did that affect your plans?

CC: I admire LucasArts enormously and don't consider them competitors. Our competitors are first-person shooters. As far as we're concerned, we do LucasArts an enormous amount of good when we publish our games in this genre, and they do us even more good when they publish theirs, because it reinvigorates the genre. I'm delighted that they have a great amount of confidence in the adventure genre and continue to make games in that genre. However, we've taken a very different approach than LucasArts. If you look at *Monkey Island 3*, it's a point-a-click in 3D. *The Sleeping Dragon* is a 3D adventure game.

GMR: And on a console. Do you think console owners expect a bit more, ahem, action?

CC: This is the No. 1 challenge, of course. Our philosophy on this was to look at what makes a great adventure. Not just what makes a great adventure game, but what makes a great adventure. I would still argue that *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is the most extraordinary adventure film, and it hasn't been beaten since.

GMR: That's the mix you're looking for?

CC: Yes. So forget about point-and-click. What an adventure like that delivers is investigation, exploration, and action. So, you'd expect your character to be dangling off the back of a jeep, hurtling through the desert. You'd expect your character to be hanging off a cliff, and you'd expect to go into, say, ancient temples and shimmy along the wall to avoid deadly spikes. So it's much more than we could do in 2D. We couldn't have done it at all in 2D, but in 3D we can. On top of that, you've got action. But...the action is basically interactive cut-scenes, because with an adventure, the heart of the game is working out what you should do next, not the difficulty of actually performing that via the controls—and that is also the heart of *Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon*. **EW**

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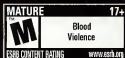
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INTO THE

IS THERE LIFE BEYOND TONY? GMR



VERLAND

VISITS T.H.U.G. DEVELOPER NEVERSOFT TO FIND OUT

➔ With skateboarding rapidly moving into the mainstream thanks to the widespread influence of ESPN's X Games and Tony Hawk's Boom Boom HuckJam tour, the time is perfect for *T.H.U.G.* to open a window into the world of an amateur skater's struggles. We chat with Tony Hawk on the matter.

GMR: Since the focus of *Tony Hawk's Underground* is on the amateur/the unknown/the aspiring skater, what was your role in the development of the game, and was it different than usual?

TH: I had the same type of input, but the added story line allowed us [me and other pros] to relay our experiences from throughout our careers and make them part of the game. I feel much more connected to this game than previous ones in terms of personal background.

GMR: You used to be able to try out some new moves in real life after you'd developed them in the game. Because the custom-moves engine is so flexible

now, are there moves in the game that are just impossible to do in real life, or has keeping things within the realm of possibility been a priority?

TH: The Create-a-Trick feature allows players to create anything from the most basic trick to complete fantasy, so it is entirely up to the user to "keep it real."

GMR: How far do you think skateboarding has come as a sport, and are the kids doing things now that impress even a veteran like yourself?

TH: Skateboarding has grown infinitely in terms of legitimacy and acceptance, and any new move or technique impresses me at this point.

GMR: What's a good board to start off with if you're a 30-something magazine editor with a calcium deficiency?

TH: Something on the bigger side, and I would recommend lightening your trucks.

GMR: Thanks for the advice. Besides *T.H.U.G.*, which *Tony Hawk Pro Skater* game has been your favorite, and why?

TH: *Pro Skater 4* was the best because it incorporated the best features of our previous games and added to them.

GMR: Did you ever imagine how big the series would become? Did you think it would be the standard by which all other action-sports games are measured?

TH: Not in the least. I thought it would be a game that skaters appreciated and left at that.

GMR: The last X Games was officially the last one you said you would skate in. Does that mean you would unofficially skate in one? Do you still skate for leisure, or would you rather just drive a car now?

TH: I stopped competing, but I skate as much as ever. We are currently on a 30-city tour with the Boom Boom HuckJam. I plan on doing this type of exhibition skating in the future.

GMR: Are your own boards just like any board you can get at a skate shop, or are they the pinnacle of modern skateboard engineering?

TH: My personal board is a little bigger and wider than our production decks because I wouldn't want kids to think they should ride a board suited to size-13 feet.

GMR: That's OK. You know what they say about guys with big feet. Lastly, what's the single coolest thing about *T.H.U.G.*?

TH: Customization. ■



"...any new move or technique impresses me at this point."

What the heck is Tony Hawk's Boom Boom HuckJam tour anyway?

➔ If you're dying to see Tony Hawk and his assembled troupe of extreme superstars do their high-flying acrobatics, there's no better time than during the 30-city Boom Boom HuckJam 2003 North American tour. Making pit stops in cities as far-reaching as St. Paul, MN; East Rutherford, NJ; Nashville, TN; and even Toronto, Canada, most anyone who wants to check out these modern-day Evel Knievels should hustle over to their nearest HuckJam location now.

Keep in mind that it's not all fun and games—at least

not for the participants (kids, don't try this at home).

To illustrate, Tony Hawk writes the following in the online-diary section of the event's website (www.boomboomhuckjam.com): "Hi all, I have never seen so many things go awry in two weeks' worth of shows, let alone in one night. Such as: Bob's board went astray during the finale, hitting Bucky in the face and giving him a black eye. Bucky couldn't remember a thing once we got back to the dressing room, meaning that he also got KO'd." Can we get a resounding "D'oh"?





THUG LIFE

GMR sits down with the Neversoft guys to talk about life, death, and skateboarding videogames

→ The *Tony Hawk Pro Skater* series has been going strong now for nearly five years. It single-handedly kick-started a genre that had lain dormant since Electronic Arts' long-lost classic *Skate or Die*. The *THPS* games unleashed dozens of wannabes developed by such disparate publishers as Konami, Rockstar, Sony, Acclaim, and even Activision itself. Game companies rushed to fill in whatever blanks could be construed as Xtreme, and with this came a flood of BMX, surfing, in-line skating, skydiving, jet skiing, and even wakeboarding games. While many of these titles have become legitimate hits in their own right, to this day, none stands taller amongst the mountain of X Games than the originator, *Tony Hawk*. The stellar marriage of near-perfect controls, excellent level design, and an ever-expanding palette of moves and features has catapulted the *THPS* series well beyond the reach of its closest competitor.

But what goes up must eventually come down, and developer Neversoft is the first to admit it. After four annual updates to its premier franchise it has also created such hits as the best comic-book videogame in years, *Spider-Man* (2000) and the sleeper hit *Apocalypse* (1998), the team at Neversoft was not only feeling the pressures of "What do we do now?" but also of its own creative juices. It was time for a change. With that, GMR met-up with three of the key people responsible for assembling the staggering effort that is *Tony Hawk's Underground*.

Joel Jewett (Neversoft's president), Scott Pease (*TH.U.G.* producer), and Chad Findley (*TH.U.G.* senior designer) are quick to point out that it takes a nation of millions (or at least 30-plus people) to create a game like *Underground*. With egos checked firmly at the door, it's clear that *TH.U.G.* is nothing if not a group effort.

The purpose of our visit was to peel back the mystique behind reinventing a proven success like the *Tony Hawk Pro Skater* series and find out what Neversoft's priorities were while making the game. We chat about the features that distinguish *TH.U.G.*,

mult over the hazards of game design, and come to the understanding that it's really all about the kids.

GMR: With *TH.U.G.*, it's clear that the big goal was to give the user a tremendous amount of creative freedom. With the face-mapping feature [on the PS2 version], kids can put themselves in the game, further customize their characters with custom moves, and then go have fun in their own user-created parks. By putting this sort of power in the hands of junior game designers everywhere, do you expect to see some truly crazy stuff?

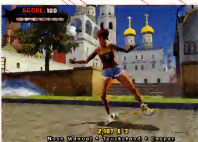
Scott: Absolutely. For example, a designer here made this level, and it was totally awesome to download this thing we had never seen before. He had made this mountain that was several hundred feet high, where you could climb this mountain, collect all these letters, and shimmy across wires.

Last year, we kind of got our feet wet with the technology so that people could upload their parks. But what we saw happen was that there were a few key fans out there who really got into it and built really cool things. In *THPS4*, we even gave them their own section in the vault online because they were really good. But that toolset was limited. This year, what they have to work with is way beyond that.

[With] most games today that have an editor, it's like rearranging things that are already in the game. Like checkpoints, or move this here or there, but not building things from ground zero. That was kind of our goal, to allow people to build the whole level and put the gameplay in it, to put the goal [in], and to put the point challenges in.

Now that we're finished with the game, we've got all the people in the office just making content to download. Another thing you can do with the level editor is create goals with just cars. Here's another emerging gameplay kind of thing: We've got a guy here who built—and remember, this is something we didn't even think of—but he's made a level that's just like *Destruction Derby*, and then he threw in a high-score goal. And the thing is, when you run it →

→ Has Neversoft outdone itself this time? It's entirely possible. When you can create an army of skaters, with completely customized signature moves, along with unlimited user maps, events, and objectives, and upload/download them to the *TH.U.G.* servers, why would you ever need another skating game? *TH.U.G.* Senior Designer Chad Findley says that they have plenty of other ideas on how to expand the series, so don't start writing your obituaries just yet.



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"If you spend your money on the game, we owe it to you to be able to pick it up, play it, and enjoy it."

into another person's car, you get points for it. So, he made up a demolition derby where the first one to get 5,000 points is the winner.

GMR: So, there's not even a skateboard in sight?

Scott: Nope. So, you got this goal, you take it online, and you can get eight people all driving around, smashing up their cars.

Chad: I wouldn't be surprised if people came up with really creative stuff. Even here, if you watch stuff going on, you'll see things being created that you never thought about.

Joel: On a whole different tangent, we added the walking, jumping up, and grabbing on to things—shimmying sideways along the power lines, for example. We made this to allow people to climb up to hard-to-reach places. And we incorporated the running into the whole combo system, and when you see guys working all that stuff in their lines, it just looks cool. So, you have people skating, doing this freestyle thing, and saying, "Dude, check this out. Look how bitchin' I look." And in the middle of the line, they jump up, catch air, jump off the board in the air, grab a power line, climb on the line, and pop into a grind, and that's just part of their line now. So, it looks awesome to watch people do these things.

Chad: And you can take these moves into all those different modes, or in any of the online modes—like King of the Hill or Firefight or the scoring-based modes—where you can use all these techniques and it's like a whole different game.

GMR: *THPS* assumed a certain level of proficiency on the part of the gamer [read: it was harder]. *THUG* seems much kinder to the end user, gradually bringing his skills up to where they need to be.

Chad: Well, that's part of trying to make a whole new game. We wanted anybody of any skill level to be able to pick this up and not need any previous Tony Hawk skills in order to play.

Joel: We had to be as kind as we possibly could. If

we're gonna build a game that's about you, and we want you to be in the videogame, we have to make it accessible to everybody, and that's why we went above and beyond this year.

GMR: Is it our imagination, or were the earlier Tony Hawk's somewhat easier than *THUG* on the Normal setting?

Joel: In the earlier games, there were things that, once you grabbed the controller, you had to really do. But now, there's so much involved with what you potentially can do that we started seeing that the least fun thing in the game is falling down. That just hurts. So, that's one of the big things in the easier modes—we made it so that you don't fall down or that it's difficult to fall down. It buys you the time to get your fingers coordinated and able to do all the different button pushing required to score. So, if you're not falling down, you're still having fun, and you can stick with the game, hang in there, and learn how to do all these things.

Chad: And we try to teach you all the things you can do, so by the end of the game, hopefully you can do spine transfers and walking and grinds and special tricks and all that.

Joel: If you spend your money on the game, we owe it to you to be able to pick it up, play it, and enjoy it.

GMR: Is there some sort of antidrug theme in the game? Some early missions have you antagonizing drug dealers.

Chad: That's mainly to give the feel to the hometown—the urban setting where a lot of people come from. One of the guys here grew up in New Jersey—that helped us build the first level.

GMR: Did drug dealers take his board from him and throw the pieces on rooftops?

Chad: [Laughs] We went on a trip to Jersey to take all the research footage, and it was pretty scary! ☹



→ Meet El Presidente: Neversoft's Joel Jewett [left] is one of the nicest fellas you'd most likely ever meet in a saloon. Sadly, you're unlikely to meet him in a saloon anytime soon, so you're just going to have to settle for playing the game. *THUG*'s producer, Scott Pease, is just as pleasant. He notes that they've got their eyes on the servers to see who comes up with the wildest park designs and moves. You never know, you could be discovered if your parks are up to snuff!



Achtung!

Hauptmann - Ihr Flugzeug brennt*



*(Translation: Hey, Captain! Your airplane's on fire.)



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OVER
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PlayStation 2



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REVIEWS YOU CAN TRUST



TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND	GC/PC/PS2/XB	065	065 PS2/XB	2 BROUCHING TEER, HIDDEN DRAGON
KARAOKE REVOLUTION	PS2	067	066 GC/PC/PS2/XB	FIFA 2004
TAK AND THE POWER OF JUJU	PS2	067	067 GC/PC/PS2/XB	HARRY POTTER: QUIDDITCH WORLD CUP
STAR WARS ROGUE SQUADRON III: REBEL STRIKE	GC/GB	068	067 GC	DISNEY PARTY
RATCHET & CLANK: GOING COMMANDO	PS2	069	088 GC	G.I. JOE HYPERKINDO
AMPED 2	XB	069	088 XB	TOP SPIN
KILLSWITCH	PS2/XB	069	090 PS2	FINAL FANTASY X-2
CASTLEVANIA: LAMENT OF INNOCENCE	PS2	070	092 GC/PC/PS2/XB	TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES
HOMEWORLD II	PC	080	092 PC/PS2/XB	SECRET WEAPONS OVER NORMANDY
HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED	PC	080	092 GC/PS2/XB	METAL ARMS: A GLITCH IN THE SYSTEM
JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY	PC	080	094 PS2	SECOM II
WWE RAW 2	XB	082	096 GC/PS2/XB	CRUE OPS
VOODOO VINCE	XB	082	096 GC	KIRBY'S AIR RIDE
SCOOPY-DOO: NIGHT OF 100 FRIGTS	XB	082	097 PC	AGE OF MYTHOLOGY: THE TITANS
MONSTER TRUCKS 4X4	GC/PS2	082	098 GC/PS2/XB	BEYOND GOOD & EVIL
LINKS 2004	XB	082	100 GC/PS2/XB	SPUNK AND THE CURSED MUMMY
ESPN NBA BASKETBALL	PS2/XB	084	100 GC/PS2/XB	XIII
NBA LIVE 2004	GC/PC/PS2/XB	084	102 GC	FIRE EMBLEM
NBA JAM	PS2/XB	084	104 GB	HARVEST MOON: FRIENDS OF MINERAL TOWN
GLADIUS	GC/PS2/XB	086	104 GB	DOUBLE DRAGON ADVANCE
SWAT: GLOBAL STRIKE TEAM	PS2/XB	086	104 GB	MUCHA LUCA
BLOODY ROAD 4	PS2	086	104 GB	TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

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1 KING OF CRAP 2 WASTED 3 BROKEN 4 MEDIOCRE 5 AVERAGE 6 GOOD STUFF 7 RECOMMENDED 8 EXCELLENT 9 MUST-HAVE 10 TIMELESS CLASSIC

WARNING! WHERE MULTIPLE VERSIONS OF A GAME ARE REVIEWED, GTA.R WILL MENTION DIFFERENCES ONLY IF THEY SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECT THE GAMEPLAY



TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND

THE FORWARD MARCH OF PROGRESS



TEEN | PS2 [REVIEWED] | GC | XB

PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION
DEVELOPER: NEVERSOFT
PRICE: \$49.99
RELEASE: OCTOBER 2003
PLAYERS: 1-4 (ONLINE)
RATING: ESR

➔ When Activision released the original *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* on an unsuspecting public, it hoped to carve a niche with skateboarding loyalists, riding on the name of the sport's most prominent figure. As it turns out, *THPS* tapped directly into the zeitgeist of the game-buying masses, practically lighting the fuse on the whole extreme-sports genre. In short, the series has been a monster success story, and deservedly so. To this day, no other comparable game has ever managed to surpass the

series' unbeatable control, features list, or gameplay [although *Aggressive Inline* comes close].

But as Mark Twain once said, familiarity breeds contempt, and after four annual injections of *Tony*, even the diehards were itching for something fresh. And so Neversoft has taken the series back to its roots and, fittingly, gone underground.

Unlike the first four *THPS* games, which focus on the pros, *THUG* puts the spotlight on the little guy, the street punk with his eye on the prize. In the

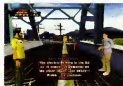
game's Story mode, you create your own character using *THUG*'s formidable array of stock parts or by uploading your own face to Neversoft's Internet servers, enabling faces to place themselves in *THUG*'s starring role. Although you start the game in New Jersey's humble suburbs, striving to rise to the top with your friend Eric Sparrow, your progress (and prowess) catches the eye of Chad Muska. Pretty soon, minor sponsorships from Stacy Peralta [the zen master of skateboarding] follow, and from there,

→ Some levels allow you to drive vehicles (or implement them in user-created maps), while others let you access hard-to-reach areas by running around and climbing stuff.

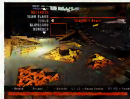
XB

PS2

GC



→ Showcase your finest park creations by uploading them to the THUG website. Neversoft is watching. Time to strut your stuff!



the sky's the limit, with rags turning to riches at every turn. Of course, the story element is only one part of the gift bag that is THUG.

As always, the now-standard feature list [Create-a-Park, Create-a-Player, Free Skate, online play, etc.] has been augmented and enhanced with more parts, a more streamlined interface, and even more online game styles. Significantly upping the ante are the powerful Create-a-Move editor and, within the context of the park editor, the ability to create and customize your own events and mission objectives. Want to build a level in which the only event is an acid drop into a bowl 200 feet straight

down, where you attempt to score as many points as possible while collecting the letters P, U, N, and K? The choice is yours. Consider that anything you create [players, parks, moves] can be uploaded to the THUG servers, and you can begin to see just how much value the game offers. If everyone who typically buys this game were to upload their own park, complete with, say, 10 events, they could download a new map every day for the next 2,739 years. If there's any downside to THUG, it's that you may never have to buy another skateboarding game. Never before has a console game offered the flexibility of a PC-strength level editor with the ability to swap and trade freely

with a nation of virtual skaters [PS2 version only]. That's maximum replay value. Of course, all this is on top of the already megafinessed Tony Hawk game engine, which now allows gamers to drive cars, run around, and climb stuff. The franchise is not only alive and well and better than ever, but also downright generous. **C**

—James Mielke

GMR 10¹⁰

BETTER THAN EVOLUTION SKATEBOARDING
NOT AS GOOD: A FAT SPONSORSHIP
WAIT FOR IT: OLLIE KING LARD

PHOTO FINISH



In case we haven't documented it enough, we'll explain the face-mapping thing one more time. Should you desire to create a character that looks like, say, a pumpkin, all you need to do is take a digital picture of a pumpkin [file-size restrictions will apply, of course] and e-mail it to the THUG servers. Neversoft will automatically e-mail you a code within the next few minutes. You then log on to the Internet with your PS2 Network Adapter, log on to the servers, enter the code, and voilà! The face is saved to your memory card, and by following the so-simple-your-mom-can-do-it instructions, Pumpkin Man can soon be yours. We expect to see naughty user-created skaters on THUG's servers shortly after the game ships.



2ND OPINION

I've played and thoroughly enjoyed all the THUG games to date, but I was a little worried that Underground would again be more of the same. Well, it is more of the same, but it's also got plenty of new stuff and fantastic customization options. Now I'm wondering about Tony Hawk: G... **C**

—Andrew Phifer

REVIEWS YOU CAN TRUST

Karaoke Revolution → TAK and the power of juju

KARAOKE REVOLUTION LET YOUR INNER AGUILERA OUT

EVERYONE | PS2

➔ *Karaoke Revolution*, combining the cherished karaoke pastime with the music/rhythm game genre, is an idea that makes all too much sense.

Music is culled from the '70s to the present day and includes tracks from Michael Jackson and Avril Lavigne. Dozens of other artists are present, though covered by other musicians. Cover quality is pretty hit-or-miss, and your own vocals drown out everything but the solos.

No matter how horrifying your singing voice might be—and we tested some terrible singers—*Karaoke Revolution*'s pitch recognition is spot on. Hitting the extreme high and low notes can prove troubling, but a little vocal practice works wonders.

Gamers not gifted with a

controllable voice will find advancing past Easy difficulty a painfully depressing process; higher difficulties will not let you ignore the subtle pitch changes during songs.

Konami and Harmonix have struck gold. Not nearly as embarrassing as *DDR*, *Karaoke Revolution* is perfect for parties and tribal gatherings. **1+**

Patrick Klepek

FOR KONAMI	PRICE	\$29.99 (IN PROGRESS)
BY KONAMI	PLAYED	6-2
BY KONAMI	REVIEWED	8-2

GMR 8/10

BETTER THAN AMERICAN IDOL
THINK OF NOTHING ELSE LIKE IT
WAIT FOR IT: MUSIC EXPANSION DISCS



TAK & THE POWER OF JUJU

IF MACGYVER RAN A ZOO...

EVERYONE | PS2

➔ THQ's *Tak and the Power of Juju* is a well-designed platformer that's clearly meant for children, but it could snare in a few older gamers with its lush graphics and intricate puzzles. Players control Tak, a young tribesman who has to rescue the villagers of Pupanunu when an evil wizard turns them all into sheep. The game is filled with nature-based puzzles: you'll entice animals, catapult from trees, and change the direction of water. For example, Tak must throw a coconut at a monkey so that it mistakenly retaliates

against a sheep on a treadmill powering a wooden elevator. Casual gamers will be able to tear through *Tak* quickly, but younger children might find some of the puzzles frustrating.

The usual platform elements are in place: items that need collecting, hidden switches, power-ups, and fancy jumping. And the developers even threw in a pair of extreme sports for good measure. Though *Tak* has a fairy to guide him, it's easy to end up running around in circles if you miss an item.

The only downside to *Tak* and

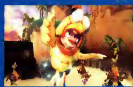
the *Power of Juju* is its timing. While it's an enjoyable game released for the holiday market, it's likely to be missed under the mad rush for *Jak II* and *Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando*. **1+**

Doug Trueman

FOR THQ	PRICE	\$29.99
BY THQ	PLAYED	1
BY THQ	REVIEWED	8-2

GMR 7/10

BETTER THAN YOKU
NOT AS GOOD AS SLY COOPER
WAIT FOR IT: SUPER MARIO ADVANCE 4



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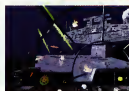
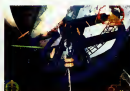
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→ You'll do more than just bow-tie tow cables around some AT-ATs' spindly girl legs and dogfight ferreling like TIE fighters in space in *Rebel Strike*. Some of the more noteworthy additions have you piloting an AT-AT walker, dogging behind enemy lines and destroying an Imperial capital ship in a multi-orbit field. So, expect many of the classic moments from the *Star Wars* film trilogy, plus some new ones.



ROGUE SQUADRON III: REBEL STRIKE

AN OLD HOPE

TEEN | GC

PUBLISHER: LUCASARTS
DEVELOPER: FICTIO 5
PRICE: \$49.99
RELEASED: OCTOBER
PLAYERS: 1-2
GENRE: SHOOTER

➔ What with *Knights of the Old Republic* being the best *Star Wars* game yet, there are many people out there waiting with bated breath for *Rebel Strike*, the latest in LucasArts' series of *X-Wing* shooters. Is it better than *Knights of the Old Republic*? No. The game's much-hyped on-foot missions—where you play movie-themed stages such as rescuing Princess Leia from the Death Star or slicing open the bellies of Imperial Walkers with a lightsaber—are, at best, clunky and, at worst, awful. [The level where you jump across rotted tree trunks in Dagobah has to be the worst thing associated with the *Star Wars* name since the *Star Wars* Holiday

Special.] Because of that, the game fails on its promise of completely immersing you in the *Star Wars* thrillology's classic moments. Boo hoo.

But take heart. *Rebel Strike*'s snarky on-foot sections are either small parts within larger stages or bonus missions, while the main brunt of the game focuses on putting you behind the controls of classic *Star Wars* vehicles like the X-wing, A-wing, snowspeeder, and speeder bike. Although these missions aren't completely without warts, they give you what *KOTOR* didn't: great *Star Wars* vehicle combat using the best items in George Lucas' toy box. The stages are varied and full of both old tricks (tripping AT-ATs with a

snowspeeder's tow cable) and new surprises (squaring off against a horde of TIE hunters in a giant moon-sized force field). Topping off the game is the ability to go through all of *RS*'s excellent missions in a spitscreen co-op mode with a friend. Although it may not be the best *Star Wars* game yet, *Strike* remains proof positive that the Force is still strong with LucasArts. **C+**
—Joe Fielder

GMR

FORCED
7/10

BETTER THAN: *STAR WARS: JEDI POWER BATTLES*
NOT AS GOOD AS: *STAR WARS: KOTOR*
YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE: *JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY*

2ND. OPINION

Rebel Strike's graphics are stunning, but the tired "go here, do this" mission structure leaves one with the feeling that the brunt of the effort went into making the game pretty, not deep, not unlike the latest spate of *Star Wars* movies. **C-**
—David Chen

THE KING OF FIGHTERS

THE KING OF FIGHTERS 2001



episode
6

THE KING OF FIGHTERS

episode
7

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Blood
Violence



PlayStation 2



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Blood
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Violence



PlayStation.2



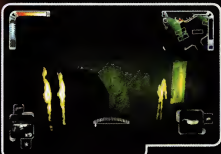
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RATCHET & CLANK: GOING COMMANDO WE'LL MAKE THIS BRIEF...

TEEN | PS2

➔ If there exists *The Cute Whatsits' Modern Guide to Good Platforming*, then *Insomniac* has swiped liberally from it. This game holds all the genre's prerequisites: shiny things to collect, a mismatched buddy pair (one's a wacky alien, the other a wacky robot), and a delightful play on words for the subtitle.

Commando does not stop there. It lifts elements from almost every other genre and manages to blend the disparate parts into an organic and delightful whole. At times, Ratchet and

Clank will have to win speeder races, swing across huge chasms, shoot down alien spaceships, and complete puzzle-based minigames—and all of it makes sense within the greater whole. Within a 10-minute chunk of gameplay, there might be a brief brawl, a puzzle to be solved, some platform hopping, and then a little squad-based strategy, courtesy of the robot-controlling automaton Clank. The shifts never jar the player out of the experience, never dent the game's inherent fluidity.

With the underlying mechanics

perfected, *Commando* gets down to the business at hand and provides a Godzilla-sized block of fun. **A-**

_Greg Orlando

THE NEW GROUNDWATER	PRICE	\$49.99
THE NEW GROUNDWATER	PLAYERS	1
THE NEW GROUNDWATER	REGION	U.S.A.

GMR ON **9¹⁰**

BETTER THAN VODDIO VINCE
NOT AS GOOD AS SUPER MARI SUNSHINE
WAIT FOR JAK II

LAMPED 2 ON THIN ICE

EVERYONE | XB

➔ *Amped* carved itself a niche during Xbox's launch, but *flaws* left it in the shadow of EA's *SSX*. *Amped 2* makes a valiant attempt to patch things up.

Grasping the trick fundamentals is a tremendous feat; the *Amped* series did not enroll in the *Tony Hawk* school of controls. For example, the right stick manipulates grabs, meaning your thumb must leap from A to the right stick almost instantaneously during a jump. Factor in the need to half-push the left stick and left and right triggers in order to get style bonuses, and you can see why intuitiveness completely disappears.

Overcome the controls, however, and you'll find quality gameplay. Oodles of missions, challenges, and secrets await ambitious shredders, while Xbox Live/XSN Sports gives online play layers of depth.

Visually, the game is top-notch. A smooth 60fps, a never-ending draw distance, and lush, expansive environments make *Amped 2* a stunner. Be sure to check out each mountain preview (particularly New Zealand's—the views are remarkable).

Certainly an improved effort, but the steep learning curve keeps *Amped 2* from becoming a genre leader. **B+**

_Patrick Klepek



FOR MICROSOFT	PRICE	\$49.99
FOR MICROSOFT	PLAYERS	1-4
FOR MICROSOFT	REGION	U.S.A.

GMR ON **7¹⁰**

BETTER THAN ESPN SNOWBOARDING
NOT AS GOOD AS SSX 3
WAIT FOR IT: GOOD AVANCEANCE



KILLSWITCH FLIP IT

MATURE | PS2 | XB [REVIEWED]

➔ With a flick of the switch, the killing commences. Namco's new third-person shooter may seem, at least initially, to pack gameplay with an arcade-like flavor. After all, the protagonist in *KillSwitch* can sprint about, overdramatically leaping, diving, and rolling like action heroes on the silver screen.

Cowboy antics here are rewarded with a hail of deadly gunfire and the heartfelt sentiment "thanks for playing, please try again." Any similarities between *KillSwitch* and a straightforward kill-everything arcade shooter are purely coincidental. Players

must use the terrain, ducking their hero behind cover and ensuring his back is firmly planted against a wall or column. At all costs, he must stay low. He is no Rambo.

When nestled against a barricade, the hero can raise his gun and fire blindly. It's not very accurate, but it does tend to make enemies duck for cover. Automatic gunfire can fill a killing zone with hot lead in a New York minute, but all the game's guns begin to pull and drift, becoming less accurate—just like in real life. Players can take advantage of this by aiming low at a target and firing a sustained

burst. From cover, the hero can twist his body to peek out, fire a few shots, then quickly return to safety. These battles, they feel real. More important, they seem dangerous. **B+**

_Greg Orlando

FOR NAMCO	PRICE	\$49.99
FOR NAMCO	PLAYERS	1
FOR NAMCO	REGION	JAPAN

GMR ON **8¹⁰**

BETTER THAN DEAD TO RIGHTS
NOT AS GOOD AS TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX
WAIT FOR IT: MAX PAYNE 2





IN MY QUEST
FOR REDEMPTION

NOT EVEN MY
DEATH

I COMMAND THE FORCES OF TIME.

DECEIVED BY A TREACHEROUS VIZIER, I WAS LED TO UNLEASH THE DARK
TOWERS OF THE SANDS OF TIME UPON THE SULTAN'S KINGDOM. NOW,
AS DARKNESS CONSUMES ALL IN ITS PATH, MY SPEED, AGILITY, AND SKILL
AS A WARRIOR ARE NOT ENOUGH. I MUST LEARN TO COMMAND THE SANDS TO SLOW,
FREEZE, ACCELERATE, AND EVEN REVERSE TIME ITSELF. IF I FAIL TO UNDO MY FATAL
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Violence
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UBISOFT



→ Cross my heart, hope you die. The cross has always been a powerful subweapon in Castlevania. But when combined with any of the colored magic orbs, it takes on new and innovative forms, like this spinning shield. Holy ****, indeed.



CASTLEVANIA: LAMENT OF INNOCENCE

LEON, THE PROFESSIONAL

TEEN | PS2

While it's not immediately apparent, producer Koji Igarashi is making a statement with his latest Castlevania game. *Lament of the Night*, *Circle of the Moon*, *Harmony of Dissonance*, or *Aria of Sorrow*. There's no outlandish castle design that turns itself upside down, no myriad weapons, armor, and magic, or numerous secret rooms accessible only by breaking down walls. In Igarashi's first attempt at a 3D Castlevania, you'll find very little in common with his last four games... and there's a reason for this.

Lament of Innocence is the first chapter of the Castlevania saga, and as

such, it is better-suited for a more stripped-down, basic treatment—one that forgoes the elaborate designs of the 2D games in favor of a more, for lack of a better word, "realistic" feel. Your nemesis' castle is laid out as one might expect an 11th century castle to be—large rectangular rooms are connected by long rectangular hallways, decorated by subtle (and some not-so-subtle) reminders that something's not quite right. The monsters populating these areas are also designed appropriately for the period, as if they really are the first generation of evil summoned by the man who would become Dracula. And when set to the backdrop of another

excellent, yet understated, Michiru Yamane soundtrack, the game comes together as aesthetic greatness. The simplicity works because the context of the story requires this approach.

What also works is traditional Castlevania combat, putting some fears to rest regarding the team's ability to transfer 2D gameplay to a 3D world. Leon begins the game with a whip and a few basic combos, but as he progresses through the castle, new and more-complex combos are learned. Evasive maneuvers set up nifty counterattacks, and you're never left feeling vulnerable. *Lament of Innocence* also features the best use of the classic subweapons—by

PLANNED: KONAMI
DEVELOPER: KCEI
PRICE: \$49.99
RELEASE: AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS: 1
RATING: T



Back... in black.



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→ Boss fights are always an event in a Castlevania game, and Lament is no different. This rock golem fellow isn't too difficult to dismantle, but the floating head of Medusa (below) can be a bitch. Girl, you gotta do something with that hair.



themselves they're quite useful, but when combined with the magical orbs, each one has several variations. Add in the use of relics as offensive and defensive weapons, and the combat variety becomes quite impressive.

But there are a few things that don't work from a gameplay perspective, due to this back-to-the-basics approach. The majority of rooms and hallways in the castle (monsters notwithstanding) are empty, which doesn't provide much opportunity for platforming. There are a few areas specifically designed for accurate and rapid jumping, and they're well done, but few and far between. The trademark secret stuff,

including most of the relics, is also small in number and incredibly difficult to actually find. It's not only possible, but also very likely that the game can be finished with most of the items remaining hidden, making the payoff for discovering them underwhelming. *Lament of Innocence* is also fairly short, as the truly dedicated can soldier through it in under 10 hours. Don't let that be a deterrent, however—it's fun to play through, and there's a worthwhile incentive to play through it again.

Even though the game lacks the bells and whistles you might expect, it remains a more than solid action game, and proof that Castlevania

actually can work in three dimensions. The story is treated with respect and subtle class (that is, if you disregard the lackluster dialogue), with the conclusion providing the foundation for the many eventual battles between the Belmonts and Dracula. As a game, *Lament of Innocence* provides an excellent groundwork for many chapters to come. **A-**

Andrew Pfister

GMR

WICKED
8¹⁰

BETTER THAN DEVIL MAY CRY 2
ON PAR WITH SHINOBI
WAIT FOR IT: NINJA GARDEN

2ND OPINION

Lament, at the very least, proves that the hardcore 2D games that we all know and love can successfully make the transition to 3D. The truth of the matter, though, is that there is still work to be done before one of these games reaches classic Symphonic status. **B+**
James Mflake

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HOMEWORLD II

NO PLACE LIKE IT

TEEN | PC

➔ In a barely finished mothership, you must mine resources, conduct research, build a fleet, and destroy the enemy that threatens to destroy your Homeworld. Sound familiar? Though the story for *Homeworld 2* is a rehash of old themes, this space-based RTS plays far better than the story deserves.

Though critically acclaimed, the original *Homeworld* wasn't a commercial success. Sierra hopes to widen the series' appeal by simplifying it—so the interface has been streamlined, you can automatically gather resources between missions, and ordering your troops on the overhead map actually works. Unit balance is also much better—most ships have useful roles in combat.

Other simplifications aren't as welcome. Gone are the intricate ship formations and walls of capital ships. Battles are now more like other RTS games: Two sides throw hordes at

each other and watch them fight. Despite the impressive graphics, *Homeworld 2* lacks some of the awe-inspiring battle scenes and scope that made the first game so memorable. Ideally, players could choose between the original or simpler fleet controls.

Despite the disappointing lack of deep tactics, *Homeworld 2* is a good game that provides a much-needed break from the usual slew of tanks, planes, and elves populating the RTS genre today. **C+**

—Di Luo

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DEV. TIGER PLAYERS
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GMR 8¹⁰

BETTER THAN: EMPEROR: JETT OF CONQUEST
NOT AS GOOD AS: HOMEWORLD
WAIT FOR IT: LOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH



HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

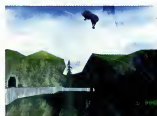
MATURE | PC

➔ *Halo* was supposed to revolutionize PC games. It was supposed to replace *Half-Life* as the pinnacle of what first-person shooters could do on PC. But then Microsoft had to go and make Xbox, and, of course, it needed good launch titles, yada yada yada.... So it's 2003, and the game finally shows up on PC, after all the die-hard PC gamers bought Xboxes so that they could play it two years ago.

But that's not to say there's nothing new about the PC version of *Halo*. The single-player game is pretty much intact, although you can no longer play it cooperatively.

The graphics look better in your monitor's higher resolution, but you better have a potent system if you want to take full advantage of it. Mouse and keyboard is a much better control option for first-person shooters, and it's somehow much easier to drive the warthog that way. A couple of new weapons have been thrown in, but only to multiplayer. In fact, the only compelling reason for *Halo* fans to buy this version is for multiplayer, which is so much better than playing split-screen on your television. Otherwise, it's the same old space opera. **C+**

—Tom Price



FOR MICROSOFT PRICE \$49.95
DEV. BUNGIE PLAYERS
EST. AVAILABLE NOW REGION U.S.A.

GMR 8¹⁰

BETTER THAN: PLANETSIDE
NOT AS GOOD AS: HALO (XBOX)
WAIT FOR IT: HALO 2

JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY

A SLIGHT DISTURBANCE IN THE FORCE

TEEN | PC

➔ Ask anybody who's played the previous *Dark Forces/Jedi Knight* games and they'll tell you straight up, they were good but friggin' tough! This latest adventure, however, makes things easier by offering a couple new approaches.

You'll create your character, ice out your lightsaber, pick force powers, and eventually choose a fighting style. While there are some early levels in which you'll need your sharpshooting FPS skills, the game comes alive with third-person action. Just try kicking the Sith outta someone and then Force Pushing 'em off a ledge.

Sounds pretty good, right? Well, that's the problem. By getting too

much power too soon, you'll quickly realize how a Jedi compares to the average schmo in some galaxy far, far away. With the exception of battling other Jedi, you'll be slicing your way through this game in no time. **C+**

—Darren Gladstone

FOR LUCASFILMS PRICE \$49.95
DEV. AWEEN PLAYERS
EST. AVAILABLE NOW REGION U.S.A.

GMR 7¹⁰

MUCH BETTER THAN: STAR WARS: OBI-WAN
LESS EYE CANDY THAN: JABBA'S DANCING GIRL
DON'T HOLD YOUR BREATH FOR IT: ANOTHER GOOD
STAR WARS MOVIE



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WWW.SPAWN.COM

WWE RAW 2 "TOO RAW" IS MORE LIKE IT

TEEN | XB

➔ Last year's bug-riddled *WWE Raw* was the first wrestling game from Anchor, whose experience with mixed martial-arts games failed to translate into the wacky world of sports entertainment. This year's follow-up adds all the match types missing from the original and includes a brilliant Create-a-Wrestler mode (including custom-soundtrack intro music), but the gameplay is still plagued with glitches and flaws. There's no spoken or written dialogue in the Season mode, and no rhyme or reason to the feuds that develop. Hell in a Cell and the Royal Rumble are hampered by arbitrary limitations. The mostly gorgeous character models are marred by clipping woes. And the A.I. wrestlers frequently engage in behavior so stupid that not even WWE's writing staff could have thought it up. Wrestling fans don't exactly have a lot of choices on Xbox, but even a captive audience should be treated with respect. **B-**

Zach Masten



PLAYERS	1-4
GENRE	WRESTLING
PRICE	\$49.99
AVAILABLE WHEN	SEPTEMBER

GMR 5¹⁰

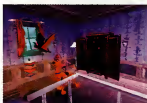
BETTER THAN: SELLING MOVIES FOR TRIPLE H, NOT AS GOOD AS: THE ROCK'S NEW ACTION FLICK, WAIT FOR IT: BACKWARD WRESTLING

SCOOBY-DOO: NIGHT OF 100 FRIGHTS SNACK TIME!

EVERYONE | XB

➔ Relive the sugar-frosted haze of your childhood with *Scooby-Doo: Night of 100 Frights* or be forever damned to suffer adulthood. A cute platformer, *Frights* drops Scooby and pals smack-dab into—wait for it—a haunted mansion. As Scooby, players hop and bop, collect stuff, use wacky inventions, rescue the gang, and tread comically through a surprisingly well-constructed world. It's suitably goofy, but with a little bit of heart and a good bit of homage. When our hero fools a specter by donning a lamp shade and standing stone-still, it's as if everything old is new again. **B+**

Greg Orlando



PLAYERS	1-4
GENRE	PLATFORMER
PRICE	\$29.99
AVAILABLE WHEN	SEPTEMBER

GMR 6¹⁰

BETTER THAN: 18 BILLION SCRAPY-DOOOS, NOT AS GOOD AS: SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS COMING THIS SUMMER, SCOOBY-DOO 2

MONSTER TRUCKS 4X4 BUMP IN THE ROAD

EVERYONE | PS2 [REVIEWED] | GC

➔ *Monster 4x4* is a decent racing game if you're into monster trucks and stadium races that are just over a minute long. The trucks control realistically, which is to say they flip out and roll at the drop of a hat. Collision detection is somewhat off—it's possible to smash through a wooden fence in one direction, only to hit it like a brick wall coming the opposite way. Cash and ramps limit the outdoor courses, and while they're somewhat fun, the commentary from CPU racers is annoying and cannot be disabled. Barely worth the effort. **B-**

Doug Trueman



PLAYERS	1-4
GENRE	RACING
PRICE	\$29.99
AVAILABLE WHEN	SEPTEMBER

GMR 4¹⁰

NOT AS GOOD AS: ANY TEST DRIVE OFFROAD, BETTER THAN: TWIN HARDCORE, GIG MOTORSPOITS, WAIT FOR IT: THE GAME TO FINISH LOADING

VOODOO VINCE DON'T MAKE ME HURT ME

TEEN | XB

➔ Within the first 30 seconds of the game, it's obvious what *Voodoo Vince* is. There's a double-jump, hover, three-punch combo, spin attack...everything we've seen from our platforming heroes before. But just because we've seen it before doesn't necessarily mean it's bad: As long as the art direction, level design, and controls are handled with competence, as in *Voodoo Vince*'s case, innovation isn't always required for a game to be good.

The selling point is Vince's powers of self-immolation, used more often than to clear out the

vicinity of nearby baddies. Some puzzles require a more elaborate death, but the concept could have been taken a step further: Keep beat the easy parts right, so here's hoping it goes for broke with a sequel. **B+**

Andrew Pfister

PLAYERS	1-4
GENRE	PLATFORMER
PRICE	\$29.99
AVAILABLE WHEN	SEPTEMBER

GMR 7¹⁰

BETTER THAN: CRUSH WRATH OF CORTEX, NOT AS GOOD AS: RATCHET & CLANK, GC, ALSO TRY: SONIC HEROES



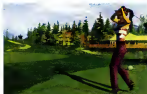
LINKS 2004 JUST BELOW PAR

EVERYONE | XB

➔ If you can accept the fact that golf doesn't always equal sexy, *Links 2004* is the less hip, straight-to-the-point golf game that *Tiger Woods* isn't.

Yes, *Links* lacks the cool personal touches and some seriously slick minigames, but this take on golf looks damn good on Xbox. In fact, graphically, it looks better than *Tiger* in many respects—especially the environments. What really wins this skins match is multiplayer. *Tiger* doesn't do it on Xbox, while *Links* not only offers multiplayer tournaments, but also the promise of new downloadable courses. **B+**

Darren Gladstone



PLAYERS	1-8
GENRE	SPORTS
PRICE	\$29.99
AVAILABLE WHEN	SEPTEMBER

GMR 7¹⁰

BETTER THAN: WATCHING GOLF ON TELEVISION, NOT AS MUCH FUN AS: TIGER WOODS 2003, WAIT FOR IT: MARIO GOLF GBA

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Official XBOX Magazine July, 2003

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POSTING UP

THIS MONTH, GMR BREAKS OFF A LITTLE SOMETHIN' SOMETHIN' IN THE LANE

Now that the buzz has worn off our *NBA Street Vol. 2* fixation, it's time to play some serious ball. But with all the options at your disposal, what's a baller to do? *GMR* is here to help you figure out which b-ball games give you the full-court press (we could say "rock the rim," but that's so gauche) and which games simply brick.

ESPN NBA BASKETBALL KING OF THE COURT

EVERYONE | PS2 [REVIEWED] | XB

Just as *Madden* continues to dominate gridiron play, so does *ESPN NBA Basketball* (formerly known as *NBA 2K4*) on the hardwood. For starters, *ESPN* easily sports the slickest graphics of this year's roundball offerings, with highly detailed, spot-on player models. Thankfully, though, this game isn't all about visual flash—the gameplay has gone through some much-needed refinements. Most notably, the dribble moves are now accessible through the right analog stick, and this collection of spins and crossovers helps open up the floor to many more fast breaks and flashier plays, both of which this series sorely lacked.

But the real difference is the game's

new 24/7 mode. Here, *ESPN* takes creating your own player to the next level—building up attributes requires successfully completing drills and facing today's NBA all-stars and retired legends 1-on-1. Plus, with the mode synced to your console's internal clock, exclusive events (like a matchup between Boston Celtics great and three-point artist Larry Bird) are available only on select times and dates, especially on holidays.

Nonetheless, there are complaints: Additional dribble moves are needed, the camera angles are all set too far away, and players away from the ball stand around too much. But even so, *ESPN* is still the baller of choice. **C**

—Bryan Intihar



DEV: ESPN VIDEOGAMES
DEV: ESPN VIDEOGAMES
REL: AVAILABLE NOW

PRICE: \$49.99
PLAYERS: 1-4 P2: 1-4 XB
GENRE: U.S.A.

GMR 8¹⁰

BETTER THAN: NBA SHOOTOUT 2004
NOT AS GOOD AS: NBA STREET VOL. 2
WAIT FOR IT: NBA STREET VOL. 3



NBA LIVE 2004 OF BALLERS AND SHOT CALLERS

TEEN | GC | PC | PS2 | XB

NBA Live 2004's shiniest new features are the presence of Mary Albert, the unofficial play-by-play voice of the NBA, and an all-new Freestyle Control system that allows gamers to execute jukes, fakes, and other ball-handling fanciness via the right analog stick. The real star of *NBA Live 2004*, however, is the superb visual quality and the newfound ease with which players can set plays and change defenses using the D-pad.

And then there's the long-running series' often-overlooked depth, which allows gamers to customize the style

of their game. Hate the archaic shooting controls, which force gamers to time their Shoot-button release to coincide with the high point of their player's leap? Automate it and let chance dictate the results. Like a fast-paced, *NBA Jam*-style run-and-gun game with no fouls and lots of scoring? Use *NBA Live*'s sliders to customize the gameplay in a large variety of categories. *NBA Live 2004* still feels more like televised hoops than the real thing, but it remains a great game of b-ball. **C**

—George Jones

NBA JAM A DUNK DOWN MEMORY LANE

EVERYONE | PS2 [REVIEWED] | XB

A short hiatus from the basketball courts hasn't changed *NBA Jam* all that much. Aside from the increase to 3-on-3 action, this is essentially the same game most arcade hounds plunked quarters into 10 years ago. Fans will instantly recognize and enjoy the bulbous-headed *NBA* players catching on fire, easy-to-learn controls, and above-the-rim gameplay. But with the good also comes the bad. Rebounding and chasing down loose balls remain a chore, and insane CPU catch-up still plagues the franchise. So smashing the controller happens in only a

matter of time when facing tougher squads. Unless you're feeling nostalgic, you're better off stickin' with EA's *NBA Street* series for over-the-top roundball fun. **C**

—Bryan Intihar

DEV: ACCLAIM
DEV: ACCLAIM/ACORN
REL: AVAILABLE NOW

PRICE: \$49.99
PLAYERS: 1-4 P2: 1-4 XB
GENRE: U.S.A.

GMR 6¹⁰

BETTER THAN: NBA JAM 2000
NOT AS GOOD AS: NBA STREET VOL. 2
WAIT FOR IT: NBA BALLERS



DEV: ELECTRONIC ARTS
DEV: EA SPORTS
REL: AVAILABLE NOW

PRICE: \$49.99
PLAYERS: 1-2 ONLINE P2: 4XB
GENRE: U.S.A.

GMR 8¹⁰

ON PAR WITH: ESPN NBA BASKETBALL
NOT AS POLISHED AS: Madden NFL 2004
WAIT FOR IT: NBA LIVE 2005



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GLADIUS

STEP INTO THE ARENA

MATURE | PS2 (REVIEWED) | GC | XB

➔ Turn-based strategy fans—all three or four of them—must feel like they've gone to heaven. This nichest of genres has exploded this season with the releases of *Disgaea*, a new *Final Fantasy Tactics*, and now *Gladius*, LucasArts' take on the *Tactics* template. Like most strategy-RPGs, it's a lot to bite off at once, but it's a fine game for players who know what they're getting into.

This is not, to dispel a common misconception, an action game; its only concession to twitchiness is a

Swing meter borrowed from golf simulations. The meat of *Gladius* isn't in the arena's action, but in the strategy involved in building a squad of gladiators through two distinctly separate campaigns.

Like *Tactics* and *Disgaea*, *Gladius* offers a huge selection of options for customizing fighters. That's both its weakness and its strength, because while the headroom available is enormous, it makes for a slow-starting game. Early battles don't offer much excitement, and the initially available crop of fighters is a pretty weedy lot. It takes patience to build a powerful, balanced stable and to advance in the campaigns.

It lacks *Tactics*' portability and *Disgaea*'s humor, but *Gladius* is still a worthy combatant. **B+**
—Dave Smith



<p>PS2: LUCASARTS GC: LUCASARTS XB: GIGAWATT</p>	<p>PRICE: \$49.99 PLAYERS: 1-4 RATING: ESR: E</p>
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GMR 7¹⁰

BETTER THAN: GLADIATOR ON DVD
NOT AS GOOD AS: FF TACTICS, JINX
ALSO TRY: DISGAEA, HOUR OF DARKNESS

SWAT: GLOBAL STRIKE TEAM

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

MATURE | PS2 (REVIEWED) | XB

➔ Yes, it's an entry-level tactical sim with loose elements of control over your team (which number a mere three, including you). Yes, your foes are the none-too-bright criminals instead of the genius ones. Yes, it looks nice at first, until you notice the lighting is on the fake side. So why give this game a chance? Besides being otherwise solid, you can voice-command both SWAT officers and bad boys, rather than issuing orders via a button. Of course, saying "BREACH! SWAT! FREEZE!" makes you look like King of the Dorks, but the novelty of yapping it up boosts this game from mere mediocrity into a somewhat-intriguing solid title. **B+**

—Thierry Nguyen



<p>PS2: JOYENT INTERNATIONAL GC: JOYENT XB: AVAILABLE NOW</p>	<p>PRICE: \$49.99 PLAYERS: 1-4 RATING: ESR: E</p>
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GMR 6¹⁰

BETTER THAN: THE SON OF ALL FEARS
NOT AS GOOD AS: SWAT 3
WAIT FOR IT: RAINBOW SIX 3

BLOODY ROAR 4

BLOODLESS

MATURE | PS2

➔ *Bloody Roar* has always been a second-string series. While others have advanced the fighting genre in the past year, this game is barely an improvement upon *Roar 3*. Several of the new characters don't even conform to the central gimmick, such as Nagi the "Spurious," a girl with a sword-arm (?). *Roar 4*'s strange campaign includes random bouts and negligible, unlockable "skills." Arenas are constrained and clichéd, and the gameplay is as button-mashy as ever. *Roar 4* is fast and fluid, but great fighters offer that and much more. **B+**

—Zach Meslin



<p>PS2: BANDAI XB: AVAILABLE NOW</p>	<p>PRICE: \$29.99 PLAYERS: 1-2 RATING: ESR: E</p>
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GMR 5¹⁰

BETTER THAN: BEING NERVOUS
NOT AS GOOD AS: SSX, CALIBUR II
WAIT FOR IT: WILD KINGDOM TAG TOURNAMENT

CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON

CAMERA OBSCURA

TEEN | PS2 (REVIEWED) | XB

➔ *CTHD* is like a ninja with one leg. It pretty much looks the part (the graphics and animations are well done), but when it comes to impressing us all with outrageously exciting kung fu, it grimaces, shrieks, lunges forward, and then just sort of falls over. It's a shame, because you can tell that Genki put in some effort and tried to vary the gameplay. But between the hostile camera system (which routinely obscures enemies), the dull pacing of the levels, and the repetitive combat, it loses something big. Something important. Something like a leg. (Thud.) **B+**

—Simon Cox



<p>PS2: MIBROT XB: BANDAI XB: AVAILABLE NOW</p>	<p>PRICE: \$29.99 PLAYERS: 1-2 RATING: ESR: E</p>
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GMR 5¹⁰

BETTER THAN: MINORITY REPORT
NOT AS GOOD AS: BUZZY THE WAMPYRE SLAYER
WAIT FOR IT: A NEW TENCHU

FIFA 2004

LET'S PLAY FOOTSIE

EVERYONE | XB [REVIEWED] | GC | PC | PS2

➔ Every year, EA Sports makes the *FIFA* games play more like real soccer. In other words, don't expect matches with final scores like 12-4. It's extremely difficult to march one guy down the pitch and right to the goal with just a few dekes, so you're forced to get good at passing. The game has a bit of a learning curve, and unfortunately, the Practice mode could've been more intuitive, like *Madden 2004*'s Minicamp mode. It was not only difficult to figure out, but also, ultimately, not even that helpful. Everything else, though, is spot on. **B+**

—Wil O'Neal



<p>PS2: EA SPORTS XB: AVAILABLE NOW</p>	<p>PRICE: \$29.99 PLAYERS: 1-2 RATING: ESR: E</p>
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GMR 8¹⁰

BETTER THAN: SEGA SOCCER SLAM
NOT AS GOOD AS: WINNING ELEVEN 4
WAIT FOR IT: WINNING ELEVEN 7

HARRY POTTER: QUIDDITCH WORLD CUP MAGICALLY DELICIOUS

EVERYONE | PS2 (REVIEWED) | GC | PC | XB

➔ The highest compliment we can give EA's portrayal of JK Rowling's magic-infused faux sport is that it's so much fun (for fans and nonfans alike) that it makes us wish Quidditch were actually real. For those who have yet to indulge in the pop-lit phenomenon that is *Harry Potter*, the game of Quidditch can be best described as lacrosse on broomsticks—a fast-paced game of possession that relies heavily on accurate passing and coordinated teamwork. Naturally, this game wouldn't work if the sport had design flaws—say, for instance, not having the right balance between regular match play and the always-dramatic chase for the Golden Snitch. But EA's expert handling and presentation (with an obvious influence from the EA Sports side) reveal that Ms. Rowling indeed has the magic touch. **A-**

—Andrew Plister



PS2 EA PRICE: \$29.99
DEV: EA PLAYERS: 1-3
REL. AVAILABLE NOW GREEN: EAL

GMR SWITCHIN 8¹⁰

KIND OF LIKE: SOCCER
WITH A LITTLE BIT OF HOCKEY
WANT FOR IT: THE NEXT POTTER MOVIE

DISNEY PARTY PARTY CRASHED

EVERYONE | GC

➔ Why GameCube needs two *Mario Partys*, no man knows. Another collection of character-driven minigames merely stretches the bounds of disbelief a little further. *Disney Party* is forcing its way into a niche that needs no expansion at all, let alone three games on one platform.

A game entering such a tightly crowded field had better be light-years beyond *Mario Party*, and this definitely isn't. *Disney Party*'s minigames are uninspired, its progress is slow, and the victory conditions drag out the misery in a seemingly unending game of screw-your-opponent bingo. It features a sprawling board made up of cleverly interlocking sub-boards, but that's about its only strength. Kids will quickly tire of the slow pace, and adults will just hate the mindlessness of it all. **C-**

—Dave Smith



PS2 ELECTRONIC ARTS PRICE: \$29.99
DEV: ELECTRONIC ARTS PLAYERS: 1-4
REL. SEPTEMBER GREEN: EAL

GMR BOOF TROOP 2¹⁰

BETTER THAN: CANDY LAND
NOT AS GOOD AS: ANY MARIO PARTY
WANT FOR IT: CULDECEPT

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GO! GO! HYPERGRIND

SCREAMEN OF THE BOARDS

PENNING | GC

➔ In *Go! Go! Hypergrind*, players can take a mechanical Frankenstein's monster-like skater, run him into a portable toilet, and stare open-mouthed as he emerges covered in a brownish substance. Truly, everything that has ever been presented in any game, real or imagined, pales in comparison.

Hypergrind supposes that cel-shaded toons are battling it out to become superstars in a Spumco animated epic, and that their wacky skateboarding antics are to be filmed. Zany tricks called Appeals can be performed throughout the stages; skaters leap over flames to catch fire, then jump on dynamite to set it off, and from there perhaps head to a circular saw for a quick decapitation. It's all good, clean, violent animated fun.

Heavily cel-shaded, *Hypergrind* uses thick lines and bright colors to render its fantasy world. The effect is overstated, but then, so is the game itself. In its attempt to be zany, *Hypergrind* overdoes just about everything. In one stage, a skater can get accorpanied by a set of gigantic, flapping marmaries. In

another, the gimmicks are placed so close together that skill becomes irrelevant—a skater can roll into a flaming lepee, catch fire, and press the X button in rapid succession to careen from bomb site to bomb site. With too much style and not enough substance, this one can only Go! Go! so far. **B-**

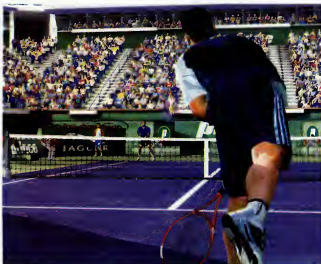
—Greg Orlando

FOR ADOS	PRICE	\$49.99
DEV. POPCORN	PLAYERS	1-2
PUBL. NINTENDO	GENRE	ACTION

GMR

6¹⁰

BETTER THAN TOXIC GRIND
NOT AS GOOD AS JET SET RADIO FUTURE
WAIT FOR IT TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND



TOP SPIN

NOTHING BUT LOVE

EVERYONE | XB

➔ Many of Microsoft's first-party sports efforts—such as *NFL Fever* and *NHL Rivals*—could use more work; however, *Top Spin* is nearly perfect. This release from MS Game Studios, despite the glaring lack of competition, is one of the best tennis game you can get.

The beauty of the game, much like *Virtua Tennis* before it, is in the simplicity and easy accessibility of its controls, giving gamers and nongamers alike an equal footing. The inclusion of different shots, such as the top spin and slice, adds depth, but not so much that it becomes confusing during the frantic back-and-forth play. The new, timing-based drop and risk



shots, on the other hand, are a little more difficult to execute and usually not worth the effort, seeing as regular shots are usually enough to win. Regardless, a robust Career mode, online play, and sharp visuals and animations make *Top Spin* an ace. **B+**

—Andrew Plister

DEV. MICROSOFT	PRICE	\$49.99
GEN. MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS	PLAYERS	1-4
REL. NOW	GENRE	TENNIS

GMR

9¹⁰

BETTER THAN SMASH COURT
ON PAR WITH SEGA SPORTS TENNIS 2K2
WAIT FOR IT NAISO TENNIS GC



REC

30 03

41:09:37

78

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Blood and Gore
Intense Violence

PlayStation 2



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→ Scantly clad and only occasionally mad, the Yu-Ri-Pa girls are the most fun-loving bunch of battle-hardened warriors you'll ever come across. Newcomer Paine gets the "Best Grrl RPG Chick Since Lulu of FFX" award.



FINAL FANTASY X-2

THERE'S A TERM FOR THIS. IT'S CALLED "FAN SERVICE"

TEEN | PS2



PUBLISHED: SQUARE ENIX
DEVELOPER: SQUARE ENIX
PRICE: \$49.99
RELEASED: NOVEMBER 2002
PLAYERS: 1
GENRE: ACTION

➔ The roleplaying genre's unluckiest sex symbol is back, along with an old friend and a moody new ally. As the first bona fide sequel in *Final Fantasy's* history, the Yu-Ri-Pa trio of formerly conservative Yuna, Rikku, and Paine (as in "pain") have triple-handledly transformed the usually serious RPG series into a campy exercise where themes such as cosplay and J-pop (Japanese pop music) are pushed to the forefront.

While RPG fans may eat this up, there's a chance it could polarize those who sit on the roleplaying fence. Given *Final Fantasy X's* open-ended finale, *FFX-2* makes sense, but when the principal structure around which your

characters switch job classes (specialized garment grids) strolls into hyper-fashionable territory, you may have reason to pause. In practice, the system works rather well, allowing for on-the-fly flexibility. Need to adjust from the sharpshooting ability of a gunslinger to the healing power of a white mage? Then go for yours, girl. The garment grid you equip determines which powers each character learns, and with so many job classes available—and with fewer characters to distribute them to—*FFX-2's* primary trio end up being far more versatile than *FFX's* gang.

But whoever thought a minigame [Sphere Break] based on math would

be fun needs to have his head checked. Still, it's less frustrating than *Buttball*.

Overall, it's great to see Square having fun with its storied franchise, and the game looks sweet. But as frivolous as it seems, *FFX-2* is most effective later in the game, when the light stuff gives way to more serious tones. A bizarre, triest triumph. **B+**

—James Mielke

GMR SASHAY CHANTE
9th
BETTER THAN FINAL FANTASY X
NOT AS GOOD AS VIKTOR
WAIT FOR ITS KINGDOM HEARTS II

2ND. OPINION

For the first time ever, I laughed out loud during a *Final Fantasy* game. That's a good thing, by the way. I really dig the lighter tone of this sequel—but it's the battle system that keeps me coming back. It's fast. It's furious. It's superb. The tiny mission-based structure also keeps things growing. **B+**
—Gerry Steinman (OPIN)



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TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES THE BEATLES OF VIDEOGAMES

EVERYONE | PS2 (REVIEWED) | GC | XB

➔ The idea of an animated beat-em-up featuring a band of, say, teenage mutant ninja turtles, has been around since at least 1989. You'll find most of the *TMNT* arcade game's signature qualities here: goofy quips, ninjas to fight, and pizza to be consumed. All of this is cel-shaded, making the game resemble an episode of the cartoon; there are numerous cut-scenes (animated just like the current Fox cartoon) in-between the missions. Unfortunately, despite there being four turtles and four ports in the GameCube and Xbox, the game supports a mere two players.

You'll also notice that these turtles

are a talkative bunch, letting loose a repetitive one-liner every time you press one of the attack buttons. Some players might be annoyed at the idea of needing to complete tasks before "unlocking" more moves for your talented turtle, and others might cite annoyances with the linear, not-very-descript levels. Yet, despite the four-player disappointment and the annoying one-liners, the *Versus* mode [where you can fight a buddy using characters you unlock], the generally solid beat-em-up action, and the nostalgia factor somewhat save these troubled turtles from obscurity. **B-**

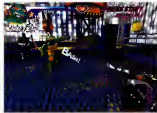
—Thierry Nguyen



DEV: ARCADE	PUBL: SGP 19
DEV: KOD	PLAYERS: 1-2
DEV: AVAILABLE NOW	OS: JAPAN

GMR HALF-SHELLED **6/10**

BETTER THAN: TMNT (GBA)
NOT AS GOOD AS: TMNT II: TURTLES IN TIME
WAIT FOR IT: LORD OF THE RINGS: ROTM



SECRET WEAPONS OVER NORMANDY JUST PLANE GREAT

TEEN | XB (REVIEWED) | XB | PC

➔ Remember Electronic Arts' long-dead plans for a *Medal of Honor* flight sim? *Secret Weapons Over Normandy* is that game—only better, thanks to the peerless design of Lawrence Holland (*TIE Fighter*). Some PC developers struggle with the game-console aesthetic, but Holland has done a brilliant job of focusing on gameplay over realism. *SWON* is powered by a solid 3D engine, an innovative control scheme (including user-controlled bullet time), and revolutionary shaky-cam views. The stunning score by *MOH* vet Michael Giacchino is just gravy. The PC version lacks LAN and Net play, but makes amends with a mission builder; the console versions feature split-screen multiplayer. Flight-sim purists will be horrified by *SWON*'s simplicity, but everyone else will be too busy having fun. **B+**

—Zach Meston



METAL ARMS: GLITCH SUPER ROBOT WARS

TEEN | XB (REVIEWED) | GC | PS2

➔ *Metal Arms: Glitch in the System* displays its major flaw in its title: A surprisingly fun 3D shooter, it's a little...you know...glitchy. But it's still a great first effort by Swingin' Ape, and a sign that the developer's work will get better with time.

The obvious comparison is to *Ratchet & Clank*, and while there is some kinship between the two games, *R&C* is heavier on platforming and puzzles, while *Metal Arms* is more of a straightforward shooter. Its weapons and enemies mesh well—the gun selection is inventive, and the A.I. goes beyond the call of duty, delivering artificial stupidity and artificial cowardice, too. Mowing down waves of bad guys is fun, but it's more fun to fire on a crowd of enemies and see some duck for cover, some run screaming, and some simply malfunction and start spraying fire at random. Location-specific hit detection adds complexity and occasional

punch lines: To save ammo, use the Ripper to shoot off an enemy's limbs, and for laughs, destroy its torso and watch the legs run free.

Holding back the fun are severe slowdown and scripting problems; hectic firefights and complex rooms often crush the game's framerate, and some event triggers can be irrevocably hung up, forcing a restart. Even considering the lenient checkpoint system, that's a hard glitch to forgive. **B-**

—Joe Fielder

DEV: REVEREND DISCREET GAMES	PUBL: SGP 19
DEV: BOWLING APE	PLAYERS: 1-4
DEV: NOVEMBER	OS: USA

GMR WATCH IT, MAKE IT BLANK **7/10**

BETTER THAN: FUTURAMA
NOT AS GOOD AS: THINERLUTTERS 2
WAIT FOR IT: RATCHET & CLANK 2



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→ Oh, what fun it is to have friends! Calling out enemy positions for your team's sniper or laying down covering fire for your buddies—these are the kinds of thrills you just don't get playing every man for himself.



SOCOM II

SMELLS LIKE VICTORY



MATURE | PS2

PUBLISHER: SONY USA
DEVELOPER: OPPER INTERACTIVE
PRICE: \$49.99
RELEASED: NOVEMBER
PLAYERS: 1 (2-4 ONLINE)
REGION: USA

➔ Think of **SOCOM II** as a fan service for everyone who loves the first game: This sequel has the same great team-based shooter gameplay and tight controls you know and love, with new levels and a host of welcome tweaks and small upgrades.

Once again, the single-player game throws you and your three A.I. teammates into a variety of tense missions with cool objectives, including taking out a coke lab in the middle of the Brazilian rain forest and rescuing workers from the downtown embassy of a city under siege. The real excitement, though, comes from working as a team. Your A.I. partners can be commanded easily via a headset

mic or onscreen menus, and they behave themselves much better than in the last **SOCOM**, to the point where you eventually trust them with your life.

But the brilliant online multiplayer game is what will keep you playing **SOCOM II** months from now. As in single player, strategy is key—this isn't a mindless *Quake*-style fragfest. Anyone can be killed by a single well-aimed shot, and there are different goals besides killing (like escorting hostages or busting into a base), so players have good reason to work cooperatively.

And old annoyances have been addressed: You can use voice chat in the lobbies and put your buddies on a

friends list to find them and send them messages (even when they are in a game). Also, cheating should be cut way down by other added measures.

The new levels are great, too. Huge and filled with tons more shrubbery to use as camouflage, they all have the same interconnecting paths and well-balanced feel that made the old maps so replayable. **A-**

—Mark MacDonald

GMR 9/10

BETTER THAN ANY OTHER ONLINE CONSOLE SHOOTER MUCH BETTER THAN ACTUALLY BEING SHOT AT WAIT FOR IT: EXTRA DOWNLOADABLE CONTENT

2ND. OPINION

It's amazing how much difference some random outcroppings of grass can make, but walking out, upright, into an open field in **SOCOM II** is now tantamount to suicide. With its strategy quotient doubled, **SOCOM II** makes for a compelling strategic shooter as much as it does an all-out action game. **A-**
—James Maile

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ROGUE OPS

SILENT BUT DEADLY

MATURE | PS2 (REVIEWED) | XB | GC

➔ Here's how you copy a bunch of good games and try to throw people off the scent: Cast the lead character as a hot, sassy woman as opposed to a grizzled combat vet.

By borrowing heavily from the likes of *Metal Gear Solid* and *Splinter Cell*, *Rogue Ops* is actually kinda entertaining in that "stealthily slinking around and assassinating" way that's all the rage these days. *Ops* has a little more action than most stealth games, but it does throw in some cool conventions, such as picking pockets and a quick stick-pressing scheme for silent kills. The real problem is that you'll feel like you've seen variations of all eight missions somewhere else, and without all the hand-holding to solve the puzzles.

Want a good example of the been there, done that gameplay? Check out the museum level. You're supposed to covertly go in and grab an artifact without hurting civilians or being detected. The puzzles are

straightforward, and anything requiring brainpower is spelled out through messages from the boss and glowing icons screaming "shoot your grapple hook here, dumb ass!" Minor bitching aside, it's a solid run. **B+**

—Darren Gladstone



XB

PS2

GC



KIRBY AIR RIDE

HE'S JUST BIG BONED

EVERYONE | GC

➔ First shown at N64's unveiling back in 1995, you could say *Kirby Air Ride* is long in coming. You could also say the game was certainly not worth the wait.

Kirby throws you for a loop at the start with automatic acceleration. It throws you for another one when you realize that every function of bar steering is assigned to A. Players hold down A to brake, which in turn charges a boost released upon letting go. Kirby can also suck up enemies to gain powers with A and use them with (surprise!) A. It makes for a stuttering experience, constantly jabbing A to do anything and in the process causing Kirby to stop and jet off again.

The main Grand Prix mode is short and stuffed with poor tracks. Inconsistencies abound; some have invisible barriers preventing you from falling off, while some don't. Graphics are muddled, and it's hard to see branching paths and enemies. Not that it isn't forgiving. With auto-

acceleration and poor A.I., this reviewer managed to finish second in one race without actually touching the controller.

Top Ride—a top-down race in the vein of *Super Sprint* with creative and dynamic tracks—is *Kirby*'s only saving grace. Pity the mundane City Trial isn't the same.

If you do manage to get around the wacky premise and unintuitive controls, there is some longevity to the game, with a massive set of "challenges" to complete—but that's a big if. Otherwise, steer clear. **B-**

—Ravi Hiranand

PUB: NINTENDO PRICE: \$49.99
DEV: HAL LABS BUYERS: 1-4
RET: ETECHIES GRADES: A+ / A

GMR 4¹⁰

BETTER THAN CRUSH NITRO KART
NOT AS GOOD AS ANY OTHER KIRBY GAME
WAST FOR IT MARIO KART DOUBLE D-DISH

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY: THE TITANS

BUILT FOR D T OUGH

TEEN | PC

Expansion packs don't held to high standards these days. Publishers throw in a few new skins and maps and expect you to pay 30 bucks for it. *Titans*, Microsoft's expansion to the RTS *Age of Mythology*, thankfully tries a bit harder.

The add-on comes with a 12-mission campaign that continues the original's story. This is the weakest part of the game—short, bland, and not very challenging. An average player won't take more than eight or 10 hours to plow through it.

Titans delivers a lot of new things for the multiplayer games, though. The Atlantians now get their own culture with new gods, units, and powers. This culture excels by relying on elite humans. Their villagers don't require a drop of points, are more efficient, and have higher hit points than anybody else. The Atlantians also have many good barrack and counter units, all of whom can become heroes. Their weaknesses include the time and resources their units require and an economy that

can take a while to get going.

The expansion's namesake, though, turns out to be a bit of a disappointment. The titans are "walking wonders" available to all cultures. They are virtually unstoppable in combat but require so much time and so many resources to build that they may be a nonfactor in a game where speed and efficiency are the keys to victory.

There's enough here to warrant purchase for diehard *Age of Mythology* fans, but it doesn't change gameplay significantly enough to draw in audiences outside of the original fan base.

—Di Lou

FOR MICROSOFT BOX ENSEMBLE BOX AVAILABLE NOW	PRICE \$29.99 PLAYERS 1-8 PRICE \$24.95
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GMR COLossal 7/10

BETTER THAN AGE OF EMPIRES: THE CONQUERORS
NOT AS GOOD AS WC II: THE FROZEN THRONE
WAIT FOR IT: BLINDING SIEGE: LEGIONS OF ARMINIA



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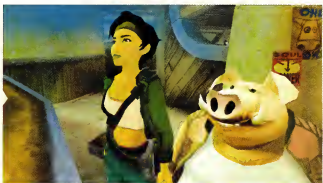
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→ The style, imagination, and ideas realized in *BG&E* are nothing if not cohesive. Imagine if *Super Mario 64* got into a car crash with *The City of Lost Children*, and you'd end up with something like this grand French parlor.



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

SIMPLY IRRESISTIBLE



TEEN | PS2 [REVIEWED] | GC | XB

➔ Like the pop song, the 3D adventure has been done many times before, with new additions to the genre merely offering a different take on the classic formula. Every now and then, however, you strike solid gold, and if *Super Mario 64* is videogaming's *A Hard Day's Night*, then *Beyond Good & Evil* is surely its *Let It Be*.

The result of director Michel Ancel's desire to get away from the 16-bit cliché of collecting hundreds of gems/coins/orbs, *BG&E* tells a story of human trafficking and galactic conspiracy through the eyes of Jade, the game's heroine. Helping her during her travels are CPU-controlled allies such as her porcine pal Pey'j and the

thick-skulled IRIS agent Double H. A petri dish of genres, *BG&E* folds multiple gaming types—including 3D platforming, *Zelda*-esque combat, hovercraft racing, air hockey, etc.—into one cohesive whole. Although some games with similar ambitions (like *Haven*) have a patchwork feel, everything in *BG&E* blends seamlessly.

A fine mix of exploration (whether speeding through the ocean or traveling on foot) and combat, *BG&E* presents a number of skill- and timing-based challenges of both the stealth and pure action variety for you and your A.I. partner to tackle. Thankfully, no puzzle is too clever for its own good, making this a truly great

time nearly anyone can enjoy. Despite the disparate gaming styles, the controls are always intuitive and up to the task [although the camera can be fidgety in close quarters]. And the game's cinema-quality plotting, pacing, and voice acting ensure *BG&E* will continue to resonate long after its time has passed. **B+**

—James Mielke

GMR TIME WELL SPENT **9¹⁰**

BETTER THAN, HAVEN
LESS CHILDLIKE THAN, KID
WAIT FOR IT, BLOOD WILL TELL

2ND. OPINION

Like seemingly every other big release these days, *BG&E* enables gamers to run, jump, sneak, collect, fight, and pilot vehicles. So why then should you care? Because this game's got character: It appears to miss out on this labor of love would be a real loss...and no one likes a loser. **B+**

—David Chen

PUBLISHER: UBISOFT
DEVELOPER: UBISOFT
PRICE: \$49.99
AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS: 1
GENRE: ADVENTURE

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Violence

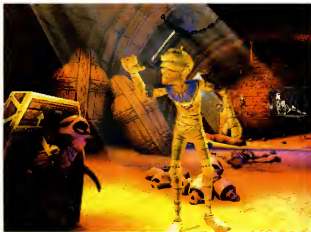


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SPHINX AND THE CURSED MUMMY

JUMP LIKE AN EGYPTIAN

TEEN | PS2 (REVIEWED) | XB 1 GC

➔ In today's big-bucks videogame world, if a development studio wants to create an original product, it first has to beef up its bank account by cranking out tie-ins and conversions—in other words, doing what it has to do in order to afford what it wants to do. Such was the case with the venerable Eurocom, which paid the bills with *James Bond* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* while beavering away for three years on its action-adventure pet project. Eurocom admits that *Sphinx and the Cursed Mummy* is a thinly veiled Egyptian-flavored variation of *The Legend of Zelda*, but whether accidentally or intentionally, the game establishes a feel all its own.

Eurocom's passion for its property and its hard-won development experience are obvious in every element of *Sphinx*, which contains a near-perfect mix of exploration, puzzle solving, and combat. I'm thrilled that at least one developer has realized that sussing out a devious, well-designed puzzle can be more satisfying than slashing through a hundred anonymous enemies. Eurocom even retrofit the design to beef up the Mummy's levels of pure puzzle solving, and I can understand why: He's a hilarious character who's much more interesting than the bland lead.

Sphinx is gorgeous on every platform, but most impressive on PS2, where widescreen-capable 60fps

graphic engines are hardly a common occurrence. The sound is somewhat less impressive, but I approve of Eurocom's decision to leave the characters mute—better to use text than to have friends, relatives, and janitors supply the voices.

There are minor annoyances and omissions that Eurocom should've known to avoid: the unskippable intermissions, the omnipresent control readout, and the camera view that doesn't quite get directly behind the character, making certain puzzles and jumps tougher than they should be. The game is also slightly too easy, although, of course, that's even more subjective than the usual review proclamations. But none of these comes close to ruining the experience; they just make the game great instead of great.

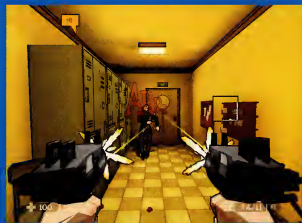
Sphinx and the Cursed Mummy is solidly designed, solidly programmed, very pretty, and about as close to *Zelda* as PS2 and Xbox will ever get. This one deserves to be a sleeper hit. **A-**

—Zach Meston

PS2	ENG	PRICE	SHIP
3/15	EUROCOM	PLAYS 1	
REL. NOVEMBER	ENIGMA	ENIGMA	

GMR 8¹⁰

BETTER THAN TIM AND THE POWER OF JLUU
NOT AS GOOD AS ZELDA, THE WIND WALKER
WAIT FOR IT, JAK II



XIII

KILLER VISUALS—BUT LITTLE ELSE

MATURE | XB (REVIEWED) | GC | PS2

➔ Looks can be deceiving. For some time, Ubisoft's *XIII* appeared as if it'd be one of this year's hottest releases. This stylish first-person shooter seemed to have everything going for it: a smart '60s-thriller-esque story, a unique visual style reminiscent of an animated film, a jazzy lounge soundtrack, and a bevy of multiplayer modes. What's missing? Great gameplay.

In *XIII*, you're a fugitive amnesiac hunted by government forces for assassinating the president. You scramble to survive a number of story-driven, objective-based stages in order to recover your identity and discover if you're innocent. Problem is, the missions are largely cookie-cutter (do tasks like "destroy four generators without being spotted" sound familiar?) and lack the thrill found in similarly themed games, like *GoldenEye 007* (N64). Worse yet, your opponents are unbelievably excellent shots who almost never miss. Since *XIII* lacks a workable autotarget (to help out console players stuck with a game controller instead of a pixel-point-accurate mouse), health power-ups, and a save-anywhere feature, you're almost unfairly matched against these so-stupid-they're-smart opponents. In other words, playing *XIII* is like having one foot already in the grave. You'll get

killed more than once in one of the lemminglike *Oddworld* games and only rarely come out of a firefight against a single opponent with more than half your health bar left. Sound frustrating? It is.

A clear case of style over substance, *XIII* is pretty to look at but a bitch to play. Even all of its snazzy extra features—online competitions for PS2 and Xbox owners and splitscreen Deathmatch and two-player co-op for all three consoles—can't make up for the hole that the evilly accurate A.I. puts in its head. **C-**

—Joe Fielder

PS2	UBISOFT	PRICE	\$49.99
DEV	UBISOFT	PLAYERS	1-2
REL	OCTOBER	ONLINE	8-8-02

GMR 6¹⁰

BETTER THAN MIKE GRIFPIN, BOUNTY HUNTER
NOT AS GOOD AS GOLDENEYE 007
WAIT FOR IT, PERFECT D-JAN 2190



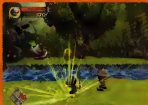
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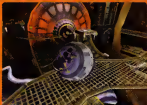
Get Ninja-crazy by collecting power-ups to incite Ninja's special Rage abilities.



Gravity? Run up walls and tear through levels with moves only the most insane Ninja would try.



Use multiple weapons to take apart any foe that dares stand between Ninja and his missions.



Five huge worlds, mini-quests and grueling missions that will separate the Ninjas from the boys.



PlayStation 2



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GBA REVIEW

TURTLES. A COUPLE OF OLD-SCHOOL BRAWLERS. AND THE DEBUT OF FIRE EMBLEM IN THE U.S.A. THE JOY!



→ Fast and furious tactical action is the name of the game here. You'll have increasingly more troops to pick and choose from as the story progresses, but tread lightly—once a unit falls in battle, he's gone for good.



FIRE EMBLEM

WEAR IT OUT

EVERYONE | GBA

➔ Had enough handheld strategy games yet? No? As if we haven't gotten enough this year, we now have *Fire Emblem*—the first in Nintendo's long-running series to be released Stateside. Bearing quite a bit of resemblance to *Advance Wars*, *Fire Emblem* is actually a pretty worthwhile entry into the genre.

Fire Emblem spins a tale of fantasy, magic, and the typical good-triumphing-over-evil business that RPG fans are used to. Mostly, it's a well-engineered excuse to get into a bunch of fights and whomp on your computer-controlled opponents.

Transpiring across more than 30 chapters (including a few secret ones), the turn-based action unfolds on a variety of top-down maps. You'll select a number of units to deploy for each scenario, relying on such fantasy staples as weapon-heavy cavaliers and nimble archers to see you through. Your troops earn experience and level up as they fight, granting better stats, abilities, and eventual upgrades to better character classes. Armories and shops dot the landscape, which can be used to outfit your army with better equipment, healing potions, and other helpful amenities.

Aside from the fantasy RPG elements, *Fire Emblem* is quite reminiscent of the *Advance Wars* series—which is to say, if you enjoyed those games, you'll find plenty to like about this one. If there's one complaint, it's the game's somewhat short length; if you're a veteran strategy gamer, you can plow through it in a dedicated day. Hidden side missions and a multiplayer link mode extend the replay value, but they won't keep you coming back quite as often as some of the other GBA strategy games out there.

Despite these shortcomings, *Fire Emblem* does offer up some

solid gameplay, sharp visuals, likable character designs, and a fairly compelling (if somewhat typical) story. Fans of *Advance Wars* will particularly enjoy it, as should plenty of fantasy RPG fans and newcomers to the genre. **B+**

—Ryan Scott

FOR NINTENDO	PRICE \$29.99
DEV. INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS	PLAYERS 1-2
REL. NOVEMBER	REGION JAPAN

GMR ^{SPINOFF} 8

BETTER THAN: RISK
ALSO TRY: ADVANCE WARS 2
WAIT FOR IT: OMNIBUS TACTICS

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HARVEST MOON: FOMT I NEVER PICKED COTTON

EVERYONE | GBA

There are a lot of things about *Harvest Moon: Friends of Mineral Town* that make it ideal for GBA, but the main thing is the bite-sized chunks of time that the game is broken up into. Each in-game day is only about 10 minutes long, so if you've got any spare time at all and you feel like a little bit of virtual farming, you can pull out the game and get your fix of chopping wood or impregnating chickens...or whatever.

The downside is that the essential sameness of every "day" means you'll get fidgety if you try to settle in for an extended session on your GB player. It may be silly to expect excitement in a farming sim, but it shouldn't put you to sleep, either. **B+**

Nich Maragos



DEV. ATKIN	PRICE \$29.99
DEV. ATKIN	PLAYERS 1
REL. OCTOBER 2003	ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR 7¹⁰

BETTER THAN: PULLING WEEDS
CONNECTS WITH: HARVEST MOON (ISO)
WAIT FOR IT: THE SIMS, BUSTIN' OUT (GBA)

DOUBLE DRAGON ADVANCE WE LOVE THE '80S

EVERYONE | GBA

Gamers often claim that graphical updates of old-school classics rock the bee's knees. *Double Dragon* betters the looks of the beat-em-up franchise that began in '85, plus adds a few gameplay twists. Purple-tights-clad femme fatales and big bald guys named Aboob, remain. But Attus has added new moves, new enemies (including tactical baton wielders and corporate suits auditioning for the Agent Smith role), and new gameplay modes such as Survival and single-player tag team (you use the triggers to switch between two brothers). Though nostalgia hounds will likely be amused, others will probably want more depth from the best

beat-em-up 1985 had to offer. **B+**
Thierry Nguyen



DEV. ATKIN	PRICE \$29.99
DEV. ATKIN	PLAYERS 1-2
REL. NOVEMBER	ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR 6¹⁰

BETTER THAN: CONTRA ADVANCE
NOT AS GOOD AS: PRIMAL FIGHT ONE
WAIT FOR IT: NEVER CITY RANGING EX

MUCHA LUCA CASTIGO! CASTIGO! CASTIGO!

EVERYONE | GBA

If the elsewhere-reviewed *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* is a textbook for making a good licensed GBA game, here we have its evil twin, *Skippy, Mucha Luca* takes a promising concept—rowdy, young masked wrestlers-in-training—and chains it to indistinct graphics, weak animation, ugly characters, and a gameplay system that fails to improve on isometric beat-em-ups from 15 years past. Eight-bit *Double Dragon* was more fun and more complex than this ostensibly 32-bit outing. What are they doing with all those bits, anyway?

Some ideas here could have worked better with help. The character-selection system is a neat play on wrestling "trios"—you can swap between the three stars at any given time. But when all three control the same and have the same slow, dull special-attack moves, one wonders why their creators bothered to take the time. **B-**

Dave Smith



DEV. ACUM	PRICE \$19.99
DEV. ACUM	PLAYERS 1-4
REL. UNLABLED	ORIGIN USA

GMR 2¹⁰

BETTER THAN: SOME SPONGEBOB GAMES, MAYBE
NOT AS GOOD AS: TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES
WAIT FOR IT: SUPER MARIO ADVANCE 4

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES TURN ON THE A/C

EVERYONE | GBA

Anyone old enough to remember the NES *Ninja Turtles* games will recognize the GBA game as half of one and half the other. It has the first game's flat side-scrolling presentation, but not its *Metroid*-style gameplay—that's been replaced by the second game's brawling style. Like the second game, you can't swap among all four Turtles, but similar to the first game, there's a more genuine difference between them.

But will anyone old enough to remember the original games buy this one, and do younger players care about the history of *Ninja Turtle* games? The answer is probably no on both counts, but kids are still getting a solid action game, as are the kids in grown-ups' bodies who miss the Turtles of their youth. KCE Studios went beyond the call of duty, crafting a solid side-scroller when it could have gotten away with a hack job.

Taking inspiration from the new Fox Box TV series has resulted in changes for the better. GBA does justice to the slicker, heftier character designs, and the levels echo the show's emphasis on solo adventures; each Turtle gets stages tailored to his personality and individual capabilities. The boss battles and

platforming challenges vary just enough, and the minigames (such as the side-scrolling shooter level and the *Excitebike*-inspired motorcycle race) are great.

You don't have to be really old or really young to enjoy this game, which can't be said for many GBA action games. A little nostalgia never hurts, but it's definitely not required. **B+**

Thierry Nguyen

DEV. KCE	PRICE \$19.99
DEV. KCE	PLAYERS 1
REL. OCTOBER	ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR 8¹⁰

BETTER THAN: ANY SPONGEBOB GAME
NOT AS GOOD AS: YOSHIE'S ISLAND
WAIT FOR IT: SUPER MARIO ADVANCE 4



NOTE TO SELF:
WATER FAIRY MAKES
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GIANT PYRO DRAGON!



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PlayStation®2



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Partial Nudity

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Foreign Ambassadors Report Peaceful Face-to-Face Negotiations with Terrorists in Venezuela

By Michael Golden
GLOBAL PRESS NETWORK

was relieved that the situation did not turn violent despite the heightened tensions between the two sides. As of yet,

is not clear

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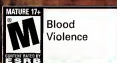


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THIS MONTH IN MORE

STRATEGY: CASTLEVANIA

→ Please allow us to take all the fun out of it

109

TOP 5 TIPS: A1

→ Code prices are rising, times are tough

112

RETRO/ACTIVE

→ Ehrgeiz is German for... "We don't know German"

114

THE LIST

→ Like you didn't already have enough to buy

116

GAME GEEZER

→ You had him at Halo...last century

122



CASTLEVANIA: LAMENT OF INNOCENCE

HOW TO BE WHIP SMART

WHEN A PROBLEM COMES ALONG

➔ *Lament of Innocence* isn't the toughest game you'll play this year, but it can get a bit tricky at times. GMR, because we love you, figured out how to beat all the bosses and found all the fun secret stuff, so you don't have to wander around Walter's crib for all of eternity. Ring our Belmont...

BOSS STRATEGIES

➔ *Lament's* boss encounters can be grueling, as these monstrosities have nearly three times the health of poor Leon Belmont. Even the odds with these strategies.



GOLEM ANTI-SOUL MYSTERY LAB

If you tackle the lab first, be careful when fighting the Golem, as he can quickly inflict a ton of damage. Don't bother with special weapons here; instead, focus on jumping whip combos and skillful evasion. You can block his punches, and when he leaps into the air, you can jump to avoid the shock wave when he lands. His second form is tougher, with his tough-to-dodge chain punch. Simply try to whittle down the Golem's health bar quickly with combos and be quick with the potions if you do get hit.



MEDUSA GARDEN FORGOTTEN BY TIME

Be sure to bring axes to this fight—they're particularly effective. Start the battle by tossing your full payload of axes while dodging her snake punches. When she backs up and squeals "I'll turn you to stone," keep moving to avoid being petrified. Eventually, she'll switch to two other attacks—one where she vomits snakes onto the ground (easy to avoid), and another where she hurts rocks at you. Block and dodge accordingly and you'll prevail.



UNDEAD PARASITE THE HOUSE OF SACRED REMAINS

Bring either crosses or holy water to this fight. This massive worm seems invincible at first...and it is. Don't attack it. Instead, focus on destroying the four pulsating eyeballs in the corners of the room. The worm won't really bother you much, so don't stop until all the eyes are obliterated. Next, a weird, mushroomlike object will rise from the central hole. Go to town on it, using your strongest whip combos. It will descend and reappear in one of the former eyeball holes. Keep attacking it and you'll soon defeat the Parasite.



JOACHIM THE DARK PALACE OF WATERFALLS

Joachim talks a big game, but he's total cake. Bring holy crosses or holy water—or even better—bring the Ice Whip. When he starts flying around, don't bother hitting him—he's invincible. Watch the floating blue light in each corner. Joachim will suddenly become vulnerable. Unleash a whip flurry on him and watch him whimper. Repeat two more times and he's toast.



SUCCUBUS GHOSTLY THEATER

Send this skank back to hell by bringing the Flame Whip to the battle. She has a wide variety of attacks and illusions, but as long as you keep a steady stream of jumping whip combos flying in her general direction, she'll suffer greatly. Watch out when she gets low on HP, though, as she'll unleash a Vine attack that can do crippling amounts of damage if you don't keep jumping away from it.



DOPELGANGER THE PAGODA OF THE MISTY MOON

You can fight your evil twin twice during the game (one time, he wields a whip; the other, he fights with only his fists), but he's quite easy both times. Use your strongest subweapon/orb combos and multitwit whip moves, and he'll crumble quickly.



WALTER THE PAGODA OF THE MISTY MOON

At the start of the fight against this flamboyant vampire, hit him once with the Vampire Killer to trigger a cinema. When the battle starts anew, he'll teleport around the room, unleashing some sort of fireball attack. He has four variations, but all are easily dodged by either evasion or simply waiting for Walter to explode near Walter. Then go in for the kill with a strong whip combo. Once you've depleted half his life bar, he'll change his attack. Any time he teleports near his throne and screams "Now, this is real power," run to the far side of the room to avoid being killed. Now, go back to the previous combo method, but beware of the whirlwinds he randomly creates. He's not that hard, really.




DEATH THE PAGODA OF THE MISTY MOON

Fighting Walter and Death in immediate succession sucks; try to conserve all of your healing items for this battle—you're going to need them. Run up to face Death, as he can do a lot of damage to you from afar. Whip away at him and dodge his scythe swings. He'll eventually call for his minions—keep whipping at Death until the minions glow red, then run before they explode. Continue this pattern for a while, and Death will change his attack pattern. He'll call down two fire blasts from the sky—time your jumps to avoid damage. Keep whipping and healing; eventually, you'll prevail.

PS2


THE CASTLE TELLS YOU SWEET SECRETS

 This gloomy castle hides a bevy of cool secrets, but many are concealed so well that most players will never find 'em. Don't fret—here's the scoop on where to find the most fashionable whips, orbs, and accessories.

SECRET BOSSES




FLAME ELEMENTAL

 Beat this fiery beast to claim the Flame Whip. You'll find the secret door to the Flame Elemental in the lab. Once you're in the second-floor room with a moving platform and two skeleton flowers, leap onto the ledge on the right side of the room, then whip up and to the right. The boss itself isn't too tough. Block or dodge its attacks and volley back with a serious whip combo. (If you have the Ice Whip, of course, break that out for a really fun time here.)




THUNDER ELEMENTAL

 To claim the Thunder Whip, you'll have to leap onto a high ledge in the garden by standing on one of the man-eating plants. After climbing a large tower, you'll reach the Thunder Elemental's lair. Its attacks are very similar to that of the Flame Elemental, so use a similar strategy of dodging and counterattacking. Daggers and axes are actually fairly effective here.




FROST ELEMENTAL

 Keep hugging the left wall in the Palace of Dark Waterfalls and you'll eventually reach a weird outline of a door on a wall. Stand in front of it and lure the heavy armor over to you. When he swings his massive flail, quickly dodge out of the way, and he'll break open the wall. After a brief jumping puzzle, you'll reach the Frost Elemental. If you have the Flame Whip, you'll make quick work of this icy maiden.



FORGOTTEN ONE

 Lament's coolest hidden boss lurks far beneath the castle. To open his chamber, you'll need a key hidden in the Pagoda of the Misty Moon. You'll find it in a secret room accessible through the dark room full of platforms. The Forgotten One has three forms, each tougher than the last. Equip the Frost Whip, load up on healing items (including uncurse potions and serum), and go to work. The first form just spews maggots at you. Keep jumping and whipping, pausing only to cure your status ailment. The second form is much harder—try to avoid the fist by dodging and jumping, and counterattack the fist itself. The third form is brutal—whip the head until its mouth glows red. At that point, hide behind a boulder and hope it doesn't give way during the energy blast. Keep this up and you'll receive the Black Orb, the strongest magical orb in the game.

OTHER GOODIES

THE WHITE ORB



You'll find this hidden magical orb in the Anti-Soul Mysteries Lab. In this room, use the Flame Whip on the gargyle statue until it glows bright red, then switch to the Frost Whip and quickly whip the statue until it explodes.

RED PHOENIX KEY



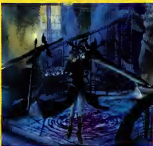
In the garden, be sure to whip every statue you see. The only one that's tough to find is the one accessible only by jumping off the body of a man-eating plant. Once you've hit all three, the door to the Red Key will open.


BLUE DRAGON KEY



In the darkest depths of the Palace of Waterfalls, you'll fight Leon's doppelganger. A few rooms after that, you'll find a room with three torches. Hit all three with your whip to open the door to the key.

SECRET CHARACTERS



Lament offers tangible rewards for finishing the game. Beat it once to unlock Joachim mode, and beat that mode to unlock the hilarious Pumpkin mode. 

YELLOW DRAGON KEY



In the room between the second and third floors of the Anti-Soul Mysteries Lab, stand on the yellow block to go down to the key's hiding place.

WHITE TIGER KEY



On the top floor of the House of Sacred Remains, hit the statues so they appear as goat, woman, goat, woman, woman. Remember that order, then head through the door to the east.

BLACK TURTLE KEY



On the second floor of the theater, you'll find a room full of skull towers and horribly narrow platforms to navigate. Strafe your way past all the skulls toward a door decorated with cherubs.

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PlayStation 2

GAME BOY ADVANCE

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A.I.

HIS CODES ARE A.E.A.L. BUT HE IS NOT

This month's collection of codes takes us from that galaxy far, far away to ancient China, which is also far, far away.

01 STAR WARS JEDI ACADEMY PC

➔ If the Force isn't with you, or you just have a natural tendency to lean toward the dark side, use these codes. Press the tilde key (~) to bring up the console, then type `helpusobi 1` to engage the Cheat mode.



Jedis Never Cheat

During gameplay, press the tilde key again, then type in these codes.

God Mode

`God` (reenter it to become vulnerable)

All Weaponry

give weapons

100 Health

give health

100 Shields

give shields

Full Force Points

give force

NPC Carbon Freeze

`d_npcfreeze 1` (enter `d_npcfreeze 0` to bring the NPCs back to life)

Set Force Powers

`Setforceall [1 to 3]` 1 is a humble Padawan, 3 is almost immortal

No Clipping

`noclip`

999 Health

undying

Code of Death

`npc kill all` [Every character dies instantly, including your allies. Use with caution.]



02 NEVERWINTER NIGHTS: SHADOWS OF UNDRENTIDE PC

➔ OK, so the last word of the title is unpronounceable, but that didn't stop this expansion pack from becoming a smash. To work your way through the game with ease, hit the tilde key (~) to open the console. Type `DebugMode 1` to enable cheats, then use the console to enter the following case-sensitive codes. If you wish to disable your cheats, enter `DebugMode 0`.

God Mode

`Dm_god`

Full Health

`Dm_heal`

Instant Gold

`Dm_givegold [number]`

Instant Character Level

`Dm_givelevel [number]`

All Spells [all classes]

`Dm_allspells 1` (`Dm_allspells 0` to disable)



03 APE ESCAPE 2 PS2



➔ The loveable Spike returns in *Ape Escape 2*, but only once you've beaten the game and found all 300 monkeys. After you've found all the monkeys, highlight New Game at the Main menu and press L1 + Start.

04 MOTO GP 2 XB

➔ You can float past your opposition (literally) by entering this creative cheat. Start a new game, make a new character, and then change the logo on his bike to read *kingpin*. We're still trying to figure out if this mode is cool or just plain weird.



05 DYNASTY WARRIORS 4 PS2

➔ Everybody was kung fu fighting / Those cats were fast as lightning / It was a little bit frightening / But they used expert timing. OK, all kidding aside, our friends at *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine* gave us these. Thanks, guys.

Unlock All Generals

R1, R2, L1, L2, Square, Square, Triangle, Triangle

Unlock All Shu Generals

R1, R1, L1, L1, Square, Triangle, Square, Triangle

Unlock All Wei Generals

R1, R1, L1, L2, Square, Square, Square, Triangle

Unlock All Wu Generals

R2, R1, L2, L1, Triangle, Triangle, Triangle, Square



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PlayStation 2

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RETROACTIVE

THIS MONTH WE HIT THE SKIDS, FLIP SOME LIDS, AND DUNK ON THE KIDS

SILENT BOMBER PLAYSTATION GOES BOOM

PLAYSTATION | FEBRUARY 2000

➔ It's funny how the best games often go overlooked and subsequently go tumbling into obscurity. That's why Retro/Active exists. To remind you of the awesome stuff you foolishly passed up while plunking down for some crap game with a big brand name.

Now that the veil of shame has lifted from your heads, know that *Silent Bomber* is one of those oft-overlooked games. Developed by CyberConnect, the folks behind Bandai's four-part magnum opus, *Jack, Silent Bomber* is one of the preeminent action games of the 32-bit era. Combining the lock-on mechanics of *Panzer Dragon* with a futuristic milieu

reminiscent of *Metal Gear Solid*, *Bomber* puts the gamer in the role of Jutah Fate, a genetically engineered soldier caught in the middle of an intergalactic struggle.

Contrived story line (and bad, bad, bad voice acting) aside, *Bomber's* action quotient is relentless. It produces a near-endless stream of enemies to blow up, using a limited but highly effective selection of sticky bombs, plus napalm, gravity, and paralysis liquids. Jutah's effectiveness grows as you upgrade his equipment, and the controls are just perfect. Worth whatever you pay for it, this is the essence of action gaming. **B+**

James Mielke

NOW About as hard to find as *** *Klonoa: Door to Phantomile*, except that people have actually heard of *Klonoa*. That ain't right. **HARD TO FIND**

GMR 8 ¹⁰

THEN A low print run (Bandai made, like, four copies) and minimal advertising support doomed *Silent Bomber* to "in the know" status.

GMR 8 ¹⁰



➔ Tifa, Cloud, and Sephiroth from *Final Fantasy VII* make an appearance in *Ehrgeiz*, but it's not enough to save this game from being mediocre.



➔ If you enjoy crap fighting games, then by all means, pick up *Ehrgeiz*. But when superior fighting games like *Tekken 2* exist on PS1, there's no reason to play this.

EHERGEIZ NO BALLS COMPARED TO THE TOBALS

PLAYSTATION | APRIL 1999

➔ From *The Bouncer* to *Chocobo Racing* and even as recently as *Driving Emotion Type-S*, Square's history has been littered with bold experiments for turning a profit in something besides RPGs. Most of which, it's worth adding, were buried in the bargain shelves almost immediately. It's hard to believe, then, that Square was once known for publishing decent 3D fighters—exemplified when you load up *Ehrgeiz: God Bless the Ring*.

Ehrgeiz was developed by Dream Factory, maker of *Tobal No. 1* and the infamous *Kakuto Chojin* for Xbox. Unlike *Tobal No. 1* and 2, *Ehrgeiz* is designed to be simple for beginners: You can move around the ring at will, and nearly every nonspecial move can be blocked easily.

The emphasis here is on arcade button-mashing and smooth, detailed graphics...oh, and the six unlockable characters from *Final Fantasy VII* likely didn't hurt sales, either. Once the fighting wears thin, you can take a browse through the game's assorted bonuses, including an RPG-like Quest mode and one of the oddest versions of *Othello* ever put to disc.

This pick-up-and-play philosophy is both *Ehrgeiz's* greatest asset and its biggest fault. There are lots of distressing game-balance problems...in fact, you can use Cloud Strife's low kick to defeat every CPU enemy in the game. If, that is, you muster the enthusiasm to do so. Which might be questionable, given the samey fighting. **C+**

Kevin Gifford

NOW It's got a neat Quest mode, but *** this fighting's boring. The *Bouncer* was an improvement upon this—need we say more? **EASY TO FIND**

GMR 5 ¹⁰

THEN Fighting maniacs picked on *** its tiny crinoids and unbalanced characters. Casual gamers ignored them and played it to bits anyway.

GMR 7 ¹⁰



➔ *Silent Bomber* is still one of the best pure action games you will play on any current, retro, or next-generation system. Finding a copy, however, is extremely difficult.

MORE

lots, codes, strategies, D.C.s and more!



NO ABILITY

CARD FIGHTERS CLASH HIT THE DECK

NEO GEO POCKET COLOR | NOVEMBER 1999

➔ The best reason to buy a cheap Neo Geo Pocket Color from your local bargain bin is not, in fact, a fighting game. The NGPC hosted many great 2D fighters from SNK's classic franchises, but none of them had the addictive quality of a simple card-battle RPG. *SNK vs. Capcom: Card Fighters Clash*, the first crossover between the two fighting giants, is arguably the most addictive game to grace the handheld—except, perhaps, for its Japan-only sequel.

Card Fighter's Clash has the expected structural similarity to other card-battle games, but it stands out with its own distinctive gameplay. Its combat system is quick and simple, unlike the involved Pokémon trading-card game. Each player



→ Building the perfect deck takes tons of practice, playtime, and success in the public arena, since the best cards are gotten only from defeating the most difficult opponents. *Card Fighters Clash* features loads of replay value. We'd love to see a new version for GBA.



fields only three cards in play at a time, so immediate strategies never become overly complex, the card turnover rate is high, and bogged-down stalemates are very rare.

Even if *Card Fighter's Clash* weren't so much fun to play, though, it would still be a fascinating little art gallery. There are 300 cards total in both versions of the game, and somewhere in the collection, there's a cute SD illustration of almost any character either company has created. Stars from *Street Fighter* and *Fatal Fury* take center stage, but there are just as many bizarre obscurities from *WarZard*, *Cyberbots*, *Athena*, and *Top Hunter*.

The in-joke-y style of card design extends to the game world

as well. Modern Tokyo is the setting for a loosely defined quest, with locales patterned after popular arcades such as Neo Geo World and Plaza Capcom. This is a card game first and an RPG in distant second, but there's still plenty to do in between searching for opponents. Trivia buffs can hunt down a host of cameo appearances—Shinji Mikami, Akiman, and the shopkeeper from *Forgotten Worlds* are just a few of the hidden guest stars.

Neo Pockets can be had cheap from retailers everywhere, and *Card Fighter's Clash* is one of the most common games. It's an unsung classic and more than your money's worth, even if it's the only NGPC game you buy. **D** **Dave Smith**

WELCOME TO THE GAMING CYCLE

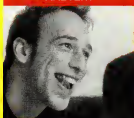
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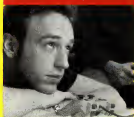
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NOW... The first of many SNK/Capcom crossovers, and as much fun as any fighter that followed.

OBTAINABLE

GMR 9th

THEN... Initial reaction: Why a card game? Upon further examination: What a cool card game!

GMR 9th



THE LIST

GMA'S EXHAUSTIVE GUIDE TO THE ONLY GAMES THAT MATTER

BUYER'S GUIDE

PS2 TOP 100 THE ONE-STOP SHOP

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	EMMIE RATING
Jack/Mutation	Bandai	We've exhausted our supply of "something within a something" jokes, so just know that the series starts to pick up in this sequel.	8
Amplitude	Sony	A whole slew of new artists who, naturally, bring along brand-new tunes for your button-pressing pleasure.	8
ATV Offroad Fury	Sony	The key to being a successful ATV offroader lies in launching yourself through the air as often as possible. A fun and floaty racer.	8
Beidler's Gates: Dark Alliance	Interplay	A beautiful-looking Dungeons & Dragons-based hack-and-slash that can be played cooperatively with another player.	8
Bombastic	Capcom	Kudos to Capcom for bringing over the excellent Devil Dice series. Roll those dice, daddy needs a new pair of Dual Shocks.	8
Breath of Fire: Dragon Quarter	Capcom	An RPG that forces you to die and start over multiple times? It sounds ridiculous, but it actually works.	8
Burnout 2: Point of Impact	Acclaim	An aggressive driving simulator that defies the rules of physics. Includes a dedicated Crash mode for aspiring demolition-derby stars.	8
Capcom vs. SNK 2	Capcom	Take the best elements of Street Fighter and King of Fighters, and you'll have the best thing going in the world of 2D combat.	8
Chaos Legion	Capcom	Storm through 15 levels of nonstop action, commanding various squads of bodyguards. It's like Devil May Cry, only not so antisocial.	8
Colin McRae Rally 3	Codemasters	A superb rally racer with superrealistic properties—right down to the extended time you spend sitting in the Ford Focus.	8
Contra: Shattered Soldier	Konami	After numerous shoddy attempts to bring the classic Contra gameplay to a next-gen system, Konami finally gets it right.	8
Crazy Taxi	Acclaim	As good as operating your PlayStation 2, rigging Dreamcast hardware inside, and then loading up a DC build of Crazy Taxi.	8
Dance Dance Revolution DDRMax	Konami	Before, if you wanted to play DDR, you had to subject yourself to Joe and Jane Public. Now, you can embarrass yourself at home.	8
Dark Cloud 2	Sony	Improves upon the first one in every way imaginable. Building and upgrading weapons to your liking is a blast.	9
Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2	Acclaim	Before turning to Larry Flynt for inspiration, XXX was based on the well-mannered Dave Mirra and actually focused on biking.	8
Dead or Alive 2: Hardcore	Techno	Before the entire series went Xbox exclusive, Team Ninja's gang of jiggy grapplers found a temporary home on PS2.	8
Demon's Exile: The Conspiracy	Sidos	One of the best PC games of 2000 is ported faithfully to PS2. Upgrade your character's skills and attributes as you see fit.	8
Devil May Cry	Capcom	Did you know Devil May Cry was going to be Resident Evil 4 before it was spun off into its own series? Oh, you did? Never mind, then.	9
Disgaea: Hour of Darkness	Atlus	Disgaea, aside from being a fantastically deep strategy game, is also the funniest strategy-RPG we've ever played.	8
Dynasty Warriors 3	Koei	Melee combat set to the history of ancient China. Enemies number in the hundreds along branching story paths.	8
Escape from Monkey Island	LucasArts	LucasArts has a fine tradition of putting out excellent graphical adventure games, and this latest charger is no exception.	9
ESPN NFL Football	Sega	The new first-person mode is an interesting addition to a solid game of football, but it's still not enough to top Madden.	8
ESPN NHL Hockey	Sega	The game formerly known as NHL2K2(x), where the (x) is the last digit of the year we're in. Oh yeah, it's still really good.	8
EverQuest Online Adventures	Sony Online	PS2 owners finally get to see what the whole EverQuest thing is about—and will never be seen again.	8
Final Fantasy X	Square EA	PS2's first Final Fantasy does away the traditional overworld but introduces full voice acting. Artistically beautiful, as always.	9
The Getaway	Sony	Options vary wildly on this British-themed gangster (not gangsta) game. Even the British can't agree!	8
Gran Turismo 3 A-spc	Sony	Core gameplay is unchanged, but the graphics get a complete overhaul, which makes GT3 the best-looking/sim on the market.	10
Grand Theft Auto III	Rockstar Games	A phenomenon of both gameplay and sales. A free-roaming interactive mobster film that's sold more than 8 million copies to date.	9
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	As bad boy Tommy Vercetti, there's something indescribably cool about cruising Vice City's beach strip while rocking to "Billie Jean."	10
Guitar Hero XX	Sammy	Tired of waiting for Street Fighter 4? This one should more than compensate. Great visuals, great control, and great extras.	8
Half-Life	Sierra	After it was cancelled for Dreamcast, a console version of this PC classic didn't seem very likely. But here we are.	9
High Heat 2004	3DO	The best ball game available this year. "Simulation" doesn't seem like a strong enough word to describe it.	9
Hitman 2	Eidos	Most of the problems with the original Hitman have been fixed, making this one of the more rewarding action games on PS2.	9
Hot Shots Golf 3	Sony	Some golf games need something extra to attract gamers. How about arcade-style control, annoying taunts, and multiplayer modes?	9
Ico	Sony	An undervalued work of art with challenging puzzles, fantastic lighting, and engrossing character relationships.	8
Jak II	Sony	Jak II tries to be everything to all gamers, and it ends up getting a lot of it right, but it's still derivative.	8
Jak and Daxter: The Precursor Legacy	Sony	The studio that gave birth to Crash Bandicoot brings a couple new mascots and a gorgeous new 3D world to PS2.	8
K-1 Grand Prix	Konami	The budding sport of K1 is faithfully represented here, as are the knockout blows to the jaw that sound just as painful as they look.	8
Kingdom Hearts	Square EA	When the amazing, talented artists from Square join forces with the amazing, talented artists from Disney, good things happen.	8
Klonoa 2: Lunatic's Veil	Namco	Klonoa became a rare find in PlayStation's later days. The outstanding sequel looks more to share the same fate. Grab it if you can.	8
The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers	Electronic Arts	Anything bringing the valuable Lord of the Rings license will sell well. Happily, there's more to this beat-em-up than just the name.	8
Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts	A new this year is the Playmaker system of adjusting plays as they happen, as well as a comprehensive Owner's mode.	9
The Mark of Kri	Sony	Click action game with innovative controls. Each button is assigned to a different element, allowing for combat with multiple targets.	8
Maximo: Ghosts to Glory	Capcom	It's the spiritual successor to the classic Ghosts 'n Goblins, complete with heart boxes and insane difficulty.	8
MDK 2: Armageddon	Interplay	Much improved over the original Dreamcast incarnation, MDK 2 Armageddon is one of the better recent action games.	8
Medal of Honor: Frontline	Electronic Arts	A strong single-player campaign paves the way through the beaches of Normandy and the heart of France. Great audio.	8
Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	Konami	There's a lot in this update: 350 VR missions, 150 alternate missions, five Snake Tales, and one skateboard. Yes, a skateboard.	8
Midnight Club 2	Rockstar Games	Rockstar's rebellious racer is now online, but you'd better practice mastering the game's controls before entering competition.	8
 MotoGP 3	Namco	After three attempts, Namco got it right...sort of. The realism is astounding, as long as you ignore the giant Mr. Driller.	8
Nascar Thunder 2004	Electronic Arts	It's a lot like last year's version of Thunder, only better. Obviously for the NASCAR fans.	8

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	OUR RATING
NBA 2K3	Sega Sports	Yet another compelling reason to own a PS2 Network Adaptor, NBA2K3 is the best-playing game of hoops on the system.	B
NBA Street Vol. 2	Electronic Arts	Even better than the first, Vol. 2 takes you through the legendary players and teams of the NBA's storied history. A great deal of fun.	B
NCAA Football 2004	Electronic Arts	EA took the excellent NCAA 2003 , added some new blocking and pass defense enhancements, and produced another winner.	B
Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit 2	Electronic Arts	Strangely, the game's best version is on the least-powerful hardware. Running from cops has never been this fun or consequence free.	B
NFL Blitz Pro	Midway	The arcade game that was based on regular football is now an regular football game based on the arcade version of regular football.	B
NHL 2004	Sega	It doesn't look as good as its competitors, but then again, you don't need to be pretty to score goals.	B
NHL Hit Pro	Midway	It's not realistic, but it's the closest we'll ever get to a new Ice Hockey or Blades of Steel.	B
Onimusha 2: Samurai's Destiny	Capcom	The effort put forward in defeating Nobun in <i>Onimusha</i> has gone to waste, as he's risen from the dead and is appearing in the sequel.	B
Onimusha: Warlords	Capcom	Survival-horror with a taste for feudal Japan, gorgeous artistic design, and a whole lot more action than its <i>Resident Evil</i> kin.	B
Rad, Robot, Alchemic Drive	Enix	It's hard to go wrong with giant robots blowing stuff up, but Enix's latest effort goes one step further with a novel control scheme.	B
Ratchet & Clank	Sony	Insomniac's terrific action-platformer has you jumping from world to world in search of new weapons and gadgets.	B
Rayman 2: Revolution	Ubisoft	One of the best 3D platformers available, the <i>Rayman</i> franchise doesn't get the attention it deserves. It's good, and you should buy it.	B
Red Faction	THQ	A first-person shooter that features destructible environments, driveable vehicles, and a strong single-player campaign.	B
Resident Evil Code: Veronica X	Capcom	More of a true sequel than <i>Resident Evil 3</i> , its Dreamcast debut meant many fans missed out. Problem solved!	B
Rez	Sega	A fairly standard shooter dressed as a visual and aural masterpiece. Sadly unappreciated by the vast majority of the gaming world.	B
Ridge Racer V	Namco	The always enjoyable <i>Ridge Racer</i> series scores well, thanks to solid control, an enthralling sense of speed, and a fitting soundtrack.	B
Rygar: The Legendary Adventure	Tecmo	This Greek mythology-based action game is an update of the arcade and NES classic in name only. Fun combat and great music.	B
Sega Sports Tennis	Sega	Arcade-style tennis performance when it launched for Dreamcast. It's holding up just as well on PS2.	B
Silent Hill 2	Konami	More creepy than downright scary, the <i>Silent Hill</i> series takes a more sophisticated, cerebral approach to the survival-horror genre.	B
Silent Hill 3	Konami	The third chapter of this grisly horror show once again has you running down dark hallways with a flashlight.	B
The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Wendy Universal	Holy crap! It's a good Simpsons game! Gamers will enjoy the fun driving missions, and fans will eat up the references.	B
The Sims	Electronic Arts	A new mode helps you figure out how to keep your Sim from pissing himself. Or, if you're like that, how to make him do it.	B
Sky Gunner	Altus	If you can look past the slowdown issue (and it can be a pretty big issue at times), <i>Sky Gunner</i> is great shooting fun.	B
Sky Odyssey	Activision	A flight game that channels the spirit of <i>Piloflows</i> , with mission-based gameplay and a large array of aircraft to pilot.	B
Sly Cooper and the Thieves' Raccoonus	Activision	A solid platformer with a unique aesthetic and animations. Lacks a little in the challenge department, it's a little on the short side, too.	B
SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs	Sony	Possibly the best reason to own a PS2 Network Adaptor. The team-based military tactics work better online than off.	B
Soul Calibur 2	Namco	Better than the original, but not as innovative as we would have liked. The single-player game isn't as good as <i>VFA: Evolution</i> .	B
SpyHunter	Ubisoft	As expected, the PS2 port of the Xbox original takes a graphical hit. Doesn't mean it's not a great game, though.	B
SSX	Midway	A re-creation of the classic that manages to avoid tarnishing all the good memories, which can't be said for a lot of classic remakes.	B
SSX Tricky	Electronic Arts	EA dishes individual courses in favor of one giant mountain, and it ends up making the best <i>SSX</i> yet.	B
Sub Rebellion	Metro3D	<i>SSX Tricky</i> boasts a new set of insane gravity-defying and physically impossible stunts, not to mention all-new tracks and characters.	B
Tekken Tag Tournament	Namco	Customizable submarines rule the waters of the future. <i>Sub Rebellion</i> is an action game that's short on graphics but very entertaining.	B
Tenchu: Wrath of Heaven	Activision	Essentially <i>Tekken 3</i> with enhanced graphics and tag teaming. Which isn't bad, considering <i>Tekken 3</i> is a great game to begin with.	B
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts	<i>Tenchu</i> sneaked onto the list without us noticing. We were drunk on sake and telling tales of heroism, so that might be why.	B
TimeSplitters 2	Edios	<i>Tiger Woods</i> made golf cool sort of, <i>Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004</i> makes golf games cool sort of.	B
Tokyo Xtreme Racer Zero	Crave	Everything good about the original is here, with loads of new multiplayer options, including maps, weapons, and game modes, too.	B
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Activision	Cruse Tokyo's highways in search of less-than-legal street-racing action. Despite some visual issues, it's definitely worth checking out.	B
Twisted Metal: Black	Sony	Neverlost dropped the 2-minute time limit in Career mode and added an array of objectives. Level design is a step up from <i>TPW3</i> .	B
Virtua Fighter 4	Sega	With the franchise safely out of the hands of 99 Studios, <i>Twisted Metal</i> makes a welcome return to its former, gruesome glory.	B
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	Sega	The <i>Virtua Fighter</i> series has always been finely crafted, and this version is no exception. The game's depth is staggering.	B
Wakeboarding Unleashed	Activision	The greatest 3D fighter ever created, and it's only a measly \$20. Now the lawn twice, and it's yours.	B
War of the Monsters	Sony	A surprisingly stellar extreme-sport title that manages to make the <i>Tony Hawk</i> formula work on water.	B
Wild Arms 3	Sony	King Kong's agent wanted a cool \$20 mil for this fun beat-em-up, but Sony balked and went with the less-recognizable <i>Congar</i> .	B
Wipeout Fusion	Gam	A grand adventure with a Wild West theme, endearing characters, great music, and a refreshingly uncomplicated battle system.	B
World Series Baseball 2K3	Sega	The Designer's Republic touch may be missing, but the series' oft-imitated, never-surpassed style of racing remains intact.	B
World Soccer: Winning Eleven 6	Konami	<i>WSB2K3</i> is the best-looking baseball game with a great Franchise mode, but it's got AI issues that need to be worked out.	B
WWF SmackDown!: Just Bring It	THQ	Feet down, the most natural-feeling soccer game ever. It lacks FIFA's presentation and licenses, but makes up for it in gameplay.	B
Xenosaga	Namco	Even if this game scored a zero, it would still set a track record of copies. Such is the marketing power of Vince McMahon and family.	B
Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner	Konami	A massive RPG of epic story and length. Namco's now in charge of the <i>Xeno</i> series, and this is the first of many planned chapters.	B

PS2

[BUY]

DISGAEA: HOUR OF DARKNESS

➔ Altus didn't make too many copies of this strategy-RPG gem, so if you're into that sort of thing, try to find a copy before it's too late and you fall victim to eBay prices. It's an excellent complement to *Gladius* and *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance*.



[AVOID]

NFL GAMEDAY 2004

➔ You have to wonder how much longer Sony's going to bother with the floundering Gameday franchise. With Madden and ESPN doing just fine, thanks, Gameday in its current form is just redundant. Either retool it or let it R.I.P.



→ PC TOP 50 ALMOST MORE FUN THAN FREECELL

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	OVER RATING
Aliens vs. Predator 2	Sierra	Three completely different first-person shooters combined into one dark and terrifying gaming experience.	9
Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn	Interplay	The rare occasion when the sequel to a classic goes above and beyond its predecessor. Can't wait for III.	9
Black & White	Electronic Arts	Highly conceptual God game that has you ruling over mortals with a little help from a giant cow monster.	8
Battlefield 1942	Electronic Arts	Sid Meier's classic just keeps rolling along, getting bigger and more complex while somehow managing to remain just as addictive.	10
Civilization III	Infogrames	Control a squad of elite commandos in WWII as they infiltrate, detonate, and assassinate across multiple battlefields.	8
Command & Conquer 2	EA GAMES	Control a squad of elite commandos in WWII as they infiltrate, detonate, and assassinate across multiple battlefields.	8
Day of Defeat	Activision	You won't need to upgrade your video card to play this lamprey-based WWII shooter. What a refreshing concept.	8
Darius II: Lords of Destruction	Blizzard	The sequel to the ultimate dragon-crawling clickfest should please anyone who wasted their teens playing the first game.	8
Dungeon Siege	Microsoft	Hack and slash doesn't have to be complicated. Sometimes, it can even be in beautiful 3D with no loading time between levels.	8
EverQuest	Sony Online	The massively multiplayer RPG that's so addictive, it makes crack seem like Sanka. Play this game at your own risk.	9
EverQuest: Scars of Velious	Sony Online	The expansion pack to EverQuest opens up new worlds, new characters, and tigers with boobies [finally].	9
Fallout Tactics	Interplay	Squad-based tactical strategy game set in the same universe as the classic Fallout RPG that sets a new standard.	9
Freedom Force	Electronic Arts	Clever use of strategy and RPG elements help make this witty comic-book superhero-themed game one of the best.	10
Freelancer	Microsoft	It's not as simstastic as some might expect a PC space shooter to be, but that's part of its charm. Random missions keep the fun going.	8
Ghost Recon: Island Thunder	Ubisoft	This top-notch mission pack makes a decent modern-combat simulation into an outstanding one.	8
Giants: Citizen Kabuto	Interplay	A shooter/strategy hybrid full of weird British humor, unique and beautiful 3D graphics, and naked lady sea monsters.	9
Grand Prix 4	Infogrames	It's a tough choice for Formula One fans, GP4 and F1 2002 are both worthy of your hard-earned dollars.	9
Grand Theft Auto III	Rockstar Games	The poster child for all that's wrong in gaming is chock full of all that's fun in gaming. And you get to import your own MPDs.	10
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	The PC version of the hit game sports a higher resolution, custom MP3 soundtracks, and mouse-look for easier killing.	9
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	An almost perfect blend of action and stealth, it's a humongous improvement over the first game.	9
IL-2 Sturmovik	LucasArts	Amazingly realistic WWII flight sim covering a region seldom visited in computer games: the Eastern Front.	9
Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast	LucasArts	Yeah, the lightsaber battles are sweet, but Lando's cameo just about seals the deal. And is his ship fly or what?	9
Kohan: Immortal's Gift	Strategy First	Surprisingly accessible fantasy-themed real-time strategy game that's as much fun in single player as it is against other mages online.	9
Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts	New this year is the Playmaker system of adjusting plays as they happen, as well as a comprehensive Owner's mode.	8
Max Payne	G.O.D.	Despite some corny writing, this uberlipid noir videogame feels like a movie, but plays like a great action game.	8
Medal of Honor: Allied Assault	Electronic Arts	Worth it just for the incredibly intense D-Day mission that almost matches the same scene in Saving Private Ryan.	9
Medieval: Total War	Activision	The ultimate historical strategy game has everything from political intrigue to sweeping real-time battles.	9
The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind	Bethesda	Definitive open-ended RPG epic. Sort of like GTA3, but with magic and elves and all that D&D flava.	9
Motocross Madness 2	Microsoft	It's mud-splattering, off-road supercross fun with this free-wheeling dirt bike simulator from the makers of ATV Offroad Fury.	9
NASCAR Racing 2003	Wendell Universal	It's the final installment of the series, and it's also the best. There's not much new, but everything's been tweaked to near perfection.	9
Neverwinter Nights	Infogrames	If you're a D&D nerd, then you already know, but buy this one especially for the multiplayer and user-made mods.	8
Neverwinter Nights: Shadows of Undrentide	Atari	This Neverwinter Nights expansion has almost enough content to qualify as a new game itself.	8
No One Lives Forever	Wendell Universal	Austin Powers isn't got nothing on Cate Archer, the hottest digital chick with a gun since that old hag Lara Croft.	9
No One Lives Forever 2	Wendell Universal	As funny and stylish as the original, '60s spy spoof II that's even possible and more fun to play too.	9
Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis	Codemasters	The first in the highly original series of combat sims, this soldier/high/bank sim went on to win COW's 2001 Game of the Year award.	9
Operation Flashpoint: Red Hammer	Codemasters	Letting you play as the bad guys is the sure way into our hearts. Especially when they're nasty Rookies.	9
Operation Flashpoint: Resistance	Codemasters	Features and content worthy of a brand-new game, this is a benchmark expansion for a classic overlooked game.	9
Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield	Ubisoft	The command interface and character A.I. have been revamped, but it runs slowly on anything but a high-end rig.	8
Rise of Nations	Microsoft	It's not the greatest RTS game we've played, but the nation-building aspect makes Rise of Nations especially appealing.	8
Sacrifice	Interplay	Action/strategy hybrid defies the conventions of all the genres it touches, while making for a fantastically original multiplayer experience.	9
Serious Sam	G.O.D.	Brainless running and gunning is an underappreciated way to waste a couple hours with a great-looking game.	8
Shadowbane	Ubisoft	Because of these silly things called laws, the only way we can attack and capture neighboring cities is through Shadowbane. Look out.	8
Sam Menier's Sim Golf	Electronic Arts	Sam Golf will have you laying out golf courses and building resorts like a virtual Robert Trent Jones.	8
The Sims	Electronic Arts	It's impossible to categorize EA's addictive superblockbuster life simulator, just like it's impossible to stop playing it.	10
The Sims: Hot Date	Electronic Arts	Gamers everywhere, rejoice! Finally, a game where you can actually learn a thing or two about interacting with the opposite sex!	9
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts	Tiger Woods made golf cool (sort of). Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004 makes golf games cool (sort of).	9
Titan 2.0	Buena Vista	For our younger readers, we recommend renting the original Titan, waiting 20 years, and then playing this game.	8
Unreal III: The Awakening	Infogrames	Somehow of a lakedown in terms of story and gameplay, but good nonetheless. Call us in five years when our gaming rigs can handle it.	8
Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne	Wendell Universal	Adds a single-player campaign to Warcraft III that isn't so moody and serene. There are some new multiplayer units as well.	8
Warlords: Battlecry II	Ubisoft	RTS and RPG, two great flavors that go well together—especially when combined with a big, gloriously wizard's staff!	8

[BUY]

ALIENS VS. PREDATOR 2

► Play as an alien, predator, or a U.S. Space Marine (when are we actually going to get those, anyway?) in this claustrophobic, intense first-person shooter with three different play styles. And then, just like us, get excited about the *Alien vs. Predator* movie.



[AVOID]

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN

► Yee! The QA folks must have been testing *Pirates* with patches over their eyes—the number of bugs in this game is incalculable. A couple more months of polish could have made it a more seaworthy experience.



XBOX TOP 50 TWO YEARS AND GOING STRONG

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	OUR RATING
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance	Wizards Universal	A beautiful-looking <i>Dungeons & Dragons</i> -based hack-and-slash that can be played cooperatively with another player.	8
Burnout 2: Point of Impact	Activision	An arcade racer with an emphasis on spectacular crashes, which—now that we think about it—defeats the purpose of competitive racing.	8
Colin McRae Rally 3	Codemasters	Everybody's favorite rally racer, Colin McRae, has a brand-new game featuring finely tuned physics and car damage.	8
Grazy Taxi 3: High Roller	Sega	It's hard to improve upon the original, but that didn't stop Sega from trying. Twice. The setting is new, but it plays pretty much the same.	8
Dead or Alive 3	Tecmo	It's not the deepest of fighters, but it definitely competes for the best-looking prize. Plus, the girls are back in all their bouncy glory.	8
Dead or Alive: Xtreme Beach Volleyball	Tecmo	Pro tip: When playing <i>DOAX</i> , have your TV remote close by. If Mom bursts in, hit the surf button and flip to the History Channel. She'll be proud.	8
ESPN NFL Football	Sega	The new first-person mode is an interesting addition to a solid game of football, but it's still not enough to top Madden.	8
ESPN NHL Hockey	Sega	The game formerly known as <i>NHL 2K4</i> , where the [x] is the last digit of the year we're in. Oh yeah, it's still really good.	8
Fatal Frame	Tecmo	It's creepy. It's gory. It's the Tecmo game without the boobs. Another of those games better enjoyed with the lights off.	8
Halo	Microsoft	The definitive reason to own an Xbox. There are plenty of secondary reasons, sure, but no Xbox owner should be without <i>Halo</i> .	10
High Heat 2004	3DO	The best ball game available this year. "Simulation" doesn't seem like a strong enough word to describe it.	9
James Bond 007: NightFire	Electronic Arts	GoldenEye set an impossibly high standard for the Bond license, but <i>NightFire</i> does an admirable job of re-creating the feel of the films.	8
Jet Set Radio Future	Sega	<i>Jet Set Radio Future</i> has substance and an overabundance of style. Sega simplified tagging in favor of a more robust trick system.	8
Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts	New this year is the Playmaker system of adjusting plays as they happen, as well as a comprehensive Owner's mode.	9
Max Payne	Rockstar Games	The bullet-time effect is the big draw of this action/shooter: Inspired by Hong Kong action flicks, set against a gritty New York City.	8
MechAssault	Microsoft	It's a good single-player game, but it really shines on Xbox Live, where you're pitted against other mech pilots.	8
Medal of Honor: Frontline	Electronic Arts	A strong single-player campaign paves the way across the beaches of Normandy and through the heart of France. Great audio.	8
Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	Konami	Includes the original <i>MGS2: Sons of Liberty</i> , five brand-new missions featuring Solid Snake, and a slew of challenging VR missions.	9
Nightmare II	Rockstar Games	Slightly better than Konami's <i>Motown Madness</i> , although both are worthy additions to your library—especially if you have Xbox Live.	8
NeoGeo 2	THQ	What we said: "Can only be described as the best motorcycle-racing sim on the planet." What more do you need?	9
Nascar Thunder 2004	Electronic Arts	It's a lot like last year's version of <i>Thunder</i> , only better. Obviously for the NASCAR fans.	8
NBA Street Vol. 2	Electronic Arts	Even better than the first, <i>Vol. 2</i> takes you through the legendary players and teams of the NBA's storied history. A great deal of fun.	9
NCAA Football 2004	Electronic Arts	EA took the excellent <i>NCAA 2003</i> , added some new blocking and pass-defense enhancements, and produced another winner.	9
NFL Blitz Pro	Midway	The arcade game that was based on regular football is now an regular football game based on the arcade version of regular football.	8
NHL 2004	Electronic Arts	It doesn't look as good as its competitors, but then again, you don't need to be pretty to score goals.	8
NHL HX Pro	Midway	It's not realistic, but it's the closest we'll ever get to a new <i>Ice Hockey</i> or <i>Blades of Steel</i> .	8
Otogu: Myth of Demons	Sega	<i>Otogu</i> boasts some of the finest artistic touches you'll find on Xbox. Oh, the slice and dice, destroy everything gameplay is fun, too.	8
Outlaw Volleyball	Simon & Schuster	It's like NBA Jam on the beach, only with far less clothing and class. Play it online for extra fun.	8
Panzer Dragon 012	Sega	Aesthetically beautiful and a dream to play. See what Saturn owners were enjoying seven years ago [the original <i>Panzer Dragon</i> is included].	8
Phantom Crash	Phantogram	Xbox certainly isn't lacking in mech titles. The quirky, unique <i>Phantom Crash</i> has upgradable mechs and a story-driven one-player mode.	9
Project Gotham Racing	Microsoft	The refinement of the Kudos point system is the biggest difference between <i>Project Gotham</i> and its Dreamcast predecessor.	8
RalliSport Challenge	Microsoft	This rally racer is one of the best examples of Xbox's power. More arcade than simulation, with enough depth to please both camps.	8
Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Tides of War	Activision	The single-player missions still aren't much to write home about, but at least you can play them with a pal. The online play is gravy.	8
Sega GT 2002	Sega	Sega's answer to the Gran Turismo phenomenon. Not quite as expansive in terms of tracks and cars, but better with the details.	8
Silent Hill 2: Restless Dreams	Konami	A creepy part of a creepy game with a creepy bonus: a creepy extra episode of the creepy story. Play without lights for extra creepiness.	9
The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Wizards Universal	Holy crap! It's a good Simpsons game! Gamers will enjoy the fun driving missions, and fans will eat up the references.	8
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA dishes individual courses in favor of one giant mountain, and it ends up making the best SSX yet.	9
Star Wars Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast	LucasArts	As usual, the Star Wars universe inspires great aesthetic design to complement Raven Software's solid sense of game design.	8
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	LucasArts	The best thing to happen to the Star Wars franchise since <i>The Empire Strikes Back</i> , and the best RPG we've played in years.	10
Steel Battalion	Capcom	If you want to play this game, you have to shell out \$200 for the massive controller. For those with the cash, it's well worth it.	8
Soul Calibur 2	Namco	Better than the original, but not as innovative as we would have liked. The single-player game isn't as good as <i>YF4: Evolution</i> .	9
The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind	Bethesda	An exhaustive open-ended RPG that essentially allows you to make it up as you go along, with hundreds of people to talk to.	9
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts	Tiger Woods made golf cool (sort of). <i>Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004</i> makes golf games cool (sort of).	8
TimeSplitters 2	Edios	Everything good about the <i>IPSS2</i> original is here, with loads of new multiplayer options, including maps, weapons, and game modes.	8
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon	Ubisoft	There's not much of a graphical upgrade from the PC version, but the interface and audio are improved. Goes great with Xbox Live.	8
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell	Ubisoft	Comparisons to <i>Metal Gear Solid</i> were inevitable. <i>Splinter Cell</i> holds its own, and even outdoes Konami's behemoth at times.	9
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3	Activision	If you have to play <i>Tony Hawk 3</i> , improved graphics and framerate and the custom soundtrack option make this the best version to get.	9
Unreal Championship	Atari	Mindless deathmarching with great weapon design and entertaining multiplayer modes, including the sportlike Bombing Run.	9
Wakeboarding Unleashed	Activision	A surprisingly stellar extreme-sports title that manages to make the Tony Hawk formula work on water. Watch out for the gators.	9
World Series Baseball 2K3	Sega Sports	<i>WSB2K3</i> is the best-looking baseball game and it has a great Franchise mode, but it's got A.I. issues that still need to be worked out.	8

[BUY!]

Otogu: MYTH OF DEMONS

→ Recalibrate your radars, people—don't pass up *Otogu* without trying it at least once. It plays great, it looks great, it sounds great, and it abides by one of the oldest principles in the videogame book: Destroying stuff is fun.



[AVOID!]

GROUP S CHALLENGE

→ A complete lack of online play, idiotic competitor A.I., a half-assed upgrade/garage system, and graphics unbecoming of Xbox's power. That's four flat tires, with no AAA in sight.



→ GAMECUBE TOP 50 A SMASHING GOOD TIME

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	OUR RATING
Animal Crossing	Nintendo	The game that never ends is based largely on routine chores, yard work, and interior decorating. So, why is it so much fun to play?	8
Beach Spikers	Sega	Easy to pick up and easy to play, like Virtua Tennis. As with most arcade sports games, it's definitely better as a multiplayer affair.	8
Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg	Sega	Sonic Team cracked a few eggs and whipped up a great new platformer. Yeah, that was lame. Sorry.	6
Bombberman Generation	Majesco	A surviving member of the old school, Bombberman has earned some tenure in the industry. This time, he sports a cool-shaded look.	8
Burnout 2: Point of Impact	Activision	The best-looking—and best-playing—racer on the system. Be prepared to spend many hours in Crash mode.	8
Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2	Acclaim	Before turning to Larry Flynt for inspiration, XXX was based on the well-mannered Dave Mirra and actually focused on—get this—biking.	8
Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem	Nintendo	This game, if you let it, will mess with your head. The insanity effects are clever (the first time), and the scenery is downright creepy.	9
F-Zero GX	Sega	Unfortunately, F-Zero GX doesn't include vomit bags. Or the AXI arcade machine. One of those would have been nice.	9
Godzilla: Destroy All Monsters Melee	Atari	Godzilla & Co. wrecking cityscapes and each other, with support for up to four players. What's not to like?	8
High Heat 2004	300	The best ball game available this year. "Simulation" doesn't seem like a strong enough word to describe it.	9
The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	It looks and feels like the best Zelda game ever, but sailing back and forth in the overworld just feels like work.	8
Luigi's Mansion	Nintendo	We all wanted Mario at launch, and we got this. Like getting socks for Christmas, it's good and comfortable, but not what we wanted.	7
Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts	New this year is the Playmaker system of adjusting plays as they happen, as well as a comprehensive Owner's mode.	9
Marvo Goth: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	The only thing missing is Mario hurting his 4-iron into the pond while screaming obscenities. Oh well, next time.	9
Mario Party 4	Nintendo	There are few things better in life than three friends, Mario Party, and a healthy flow of alcoholic beverages [if you're legal, of course].	8
Metroid Prime	Nintendo	As if they dissected Super Metroid, added a dimension, and put it back together again with slick graphics. In fact, it's exactly like that.	10
MLB Slugfest 20-04	Midway	What Btiz is to football, Slugfest is to baseball. If you can't sit through nine innings of the regular game, this one's for you.	8
NASCAR Thunder 2003	Electronic Arts	It's apparently the fastest growing "sport" in America, and Thunder 2003 is packed under the hood, including an in-depth Career mode.	9
NBA 2K3	Sega	Added to this year's version is a slick ESPN interface, an upgraded Franchise mode, and a fresh class of rookies.	9
NBA Courtside	Nintendo	No longer under the Nintendo development umbrella, Left Field's final installment of the Courtside series is a worthy 5-ball game.	8
NBA Street Vol. 2	EA Sports	Even better than the first, Vol. 2 takes you through the legendary players and teams of the NBA's storied history. A great deal of fun.	9
NCAA Football 2004	Electronic Arts	EA took the excellent NCAA 2003, added some new blocking and pass-defense enhancements, and produced another winner.	9
NFL Blitz Pro	Midway	The arcade game that was based on regular football is now a regular football game based on the arcade version of regular football.	8
NHL 2004	Electronic Arts	It doesn't look as good as its competitors, but then again, you don't need to be pretty to score goals.	8
NHL Hitz Pro	Midway	It's not realistic, but it's the closest we'll ever get to a new Ice Hockey or Blades of Steel.	8
Phantasy Star Online Episode I & II	Sega	Unrealistically addictive, The pursuit of rare items helps one ignore the somewhat repetitive battle land the \$9 monthly lease.	9
Pikmin	Nintendo	Mario creator Shigeru Miyamoto got the idea for this quirky strategy game from observing his personal garden. What kind of garden?	8
Resident Evil	Capcom	This remake could almost be described as a new game. But is it really Resident Evil without the laughably bad voice acting?	9
Resident Evil 0	Capcom	This one actually is a brand-new game, with significant changes such as droppable items and the dirty-sounding partner swapping.	8
Sega Soccer Slam	Sega	An arcade-style soccer game with off-the-wall characters, arenas, and power-ups. And it's still better than Virtua Striker.	8
The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Vivendi Universal	Holy crap! It's a good Simpsons game! Gamers will enjoy the fun driving missions, and fans will eat up the references.	8
Skies of Arcadia: Legends	Sega	If you missed it on Dreamcast—and many of you did—you've been given a second chance. It's even got new characters.	8
Smuggler's Run: Warzones	Rockstar Games	An enhanced version of Smuggler's Run 2, with new vehicles and maps and an expanded multiplayer mode with support for four players.	8
Sonic Adventure 2: Battle	Sega	Remember when you and your friends held daily Sonic vs. Mario debates? Don't you feel silly now? Or at least a little sad?	7
Sonic Adventure DX	Sega	SAD got an upgrade, while the original Adventure...uh, gets a bunch of old Game Gear games. Still a classic worth revisiting, though.	9
Soul Calibur 2	Namco	Better than the original, but not as innovative as we would have liked. The single-player game isn't as good as VF4: Evolution.	8
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA ditches individual courses in favor of one giant mountain, and it ends up making a meager case for the best SSX yet.	8
Star Fox Adventures	Sega	Rare's last Nintendo effort took forever, but Star Fox Adventures takes its inspiration from The Legend of Zelda—and that ain't bad.	8
Star Wars: Rogue Squadron II	LucasArts	At times, Rogue Leader syncs closely with scenes from the movies. Impressive when you consider it took only nine months to make.	9
Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	Maybe not quite as groundbreaking as Super Mario 64 was, but even when Nintendo "misses," it makes a big splash.	9
Super Monkey Ball	Sega	Monkeys in balls! An exceptional game based on a simple concept, some of the later levels will eat you for lunch.	8
Super Monkey Ball 2	Sega	Even more monkeys in balls running around for your entertainment! The extra game modes add quite a bit to the simple concept.	8
Super Smash Bros. Melee	Nintendo	A Nintendo fanatic's dream, if only for the exhaustive gallery of collectible Nintendoanabilia. Plus, you can beat the crap out of Jigglypuff.	9
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts	Tiger Woods made golf cool (sort of). Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004 makes golf games cool (sort of).	8
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3	Activision	For those with the Dual Shock hardwired into their psyche, switching over to the oddly shaped GameCube controller can prove difficult.	9
Ultimate Muscle	Bandai	If the soap-opera antics of the WWE don't go far enough over the top, perhaps the wacky Ultimate Muscle will be more to your liking.	9
Viewtiful Joe	Capcom	A refreshingly original platformer/brawler with an outstanding art style and rock-solid mechanics.	8
Wario World	Nintendo	After all this time, Wario has become quite effective at reclaiming his stolen treasure. Too effective, as Wario World is over far too quickly.	7
Wave Race: Blue Storm	Nintendo	Great wave physics, awesome weather effects, and a deeper control scheme than the original. An underrated gem of a racer.	8
WWE Wrestlemania X8	THQ	Ratings have cooled and Stone Cold has had some run-ins with John Law, but that's irrelevant, as wrestling games will always sell.	8

[BUY]

SUPER MONKEY BALL

Last month, we professed our love for all things monkey. The only thing we love more than monkeys? Monkeys rolling around in giant transparent balls. Buy this addictive little gem, and then buy the sequel for even more good times.



[AVOID]

P.N. 03

Some might admire its old-school, point-driven shooter mystique. Others will admire Vanessa's gyrating glutes. We admire neither, because P.N.03 just isn't a fun game to play, regardless of any bump shaking.



GBA TOP 50 PORTABLE PRAISE

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	OUR RATING
Advance Wars	Nintendo	Turn-based military strategy that should be a part of everyone's GBA library. Once you get sucked in, it's hard to pull yourself away.	8
Advance Wars 2	Nintendo	Wars 2 only adds a single new unit, but it's chock full of new maps, new terrain, and new CD powers.	8
Baseball Advance	THQ	There are only four stadiums or no multiplayer, but it's still a great game of baseball.	6
Boktai: The Sun is in Your Hand	Konami	It's gonna be a bright [bright], brightest sun-shiny day. Well, it had damn well better be.	6
Breath of Fire 2	Capcom	It's a port of the old SNES RPG, but we'd be willing to bet that quite a few of you missed it the first time. Don't repeat that mistake!	7
Car Battler Joe	Natsume	A fun and unique Car-PG that lets you build cars, add parts and weapons, and travel the world in search of your father.	7
Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow	Konami	Better sound and castle design than <i>Harmony of Dissonance</i> , but much too short. The soul system is ace, though.	8
Castlevania: Circle of the Moon	Konami	Castlevania is meant to be played in two dimensions, and this game shows why. A complex card system governs your special abilities.	9
Castlevania: Harmony of Dissonance	Konami	The second Castlevania is one of the best reasons to own a Game Boy Advance. The colors are brighter and the bosses are bigger.	7
Chu Chu Rocket!	Sega	A highly addictive and highly cute puzzle action game from Sega that's best played with multiple friends. Mouse mania!	7
F-Zero: Maximum Velocity	Nintendo	A new F-Zero based on the classic SNES game, with improved graphics, new tracks, and four-player support.	8
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Square-Enix	At long last, we have a new <i>Final Fantasy Tactics</i> —and it's absolutely spectacular. Set aside 60 hours of free time...	9
Final Fight One	Capcom	Another enhanced port of an SNES original. How come games of large cities don't go on ass-kicking rampages anymore?	7
Golden Sun	Nintendo	A deep combat engine and brilliant graphics make this one of the better RPGs available on GBA.	8
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Picks up right where the first one left off. The battle system remains basically unchanged, but the puzzles are much more rewarding.	8
Gradius Gaiden	Konami	Konami's classic shooter series translates to the portable very well. Great graphics and plenty of challenge.	7
GT Advance 3	THQ	The <i>GT Advance</i> series has always been technically marvelous, and GT3 (yeah, we know) finally has a battery-save function!	7
Gutter Gear X Advance	Sammy	Not surprisingly, the animation and soundtrack take a hit, but it still plays like its big brother versions.	7
Iridion II	Majesco	The first Iridion series as a neat technical demo, but its sequel concentrates more on having good gameplay. Another quality shooter.	7
Kirby: Nightmare in Dreamland	Nintendo	A remake of the NES classic Kirby's Adventure with updated graphics and multiplayer support.	7
Klonoa: Empire of Dreams	Namco	Straying from the original formula, this <i>Klonoa</i> is more of a puzzle game than a platformer, with great graphics and sound.	6
Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past	Nintendo	Invite three friends and you've got a bona fide <i>Zelda</i> party. Drink red medicine till you puke and skinny-dip in Lake Hyli!	9
Lufia: The Ruins of Lore	Atlus	Perennially overshadowed by Square's offerings, the <i>Lufia</i> series is just as engaging as <i>Final Fantasy</i> . It's also more challenging.	8
Lunar Legend	Ubisoft	The anime cut-scenes and superb voice acting may be gone, but the great Lunar gameplay and story remain intact.	8
Mega Man: Super Circuit	Nintendo	A balanced blend of <i>Super Mario Kart</i> and <i>Mario Kart 64</i> that even includes all the tracks from the former.	7
Mega Man and Bass	Capcom	It's hard, so very hard. But what <i>Mega Man</i> game isn't? Play as either <i>Mega Man</i> or <i>Wily</i> robot Bass, each one has different abilities.	7
Mega Man Battle Network 2	Capcom	More of an RPG than a platformer, the <i>Battle Network</i> series is a nice change of pace for <i>Mega Man</i> and pals.	7
Mega Man Battle Network 3	Capcom	<i>Battle Network 3</i> is pretty much more of the same with a few minor additions, but it's already a great series.	8
Mega Man Zero	Capcom	A difficult yet engaging installment of the <i>X</i> side story played as Zero, who is equipped with an arm cannon and beam saber.	7
Metroid Fusion	Nintendo	The follow-up to <i>Super Metroid</i> is eight years late, but the wait was well worth it. An adventure that ends way too quickly.	9
Ninja Five-O	Konami	A challenging platformer that brings back fond memories of <i>Bionic Commando</i> . Complete with throwing stars and katanas.	7
Phantasy Star Collection	THQ	Straightforward classic RPG action that's been overlooked for far too long. Includes <i>Phantasy Star 1, 2, and 3</i> .	9
Pokémon Ruby & Sapphire	Nintendo	Aside from 2-on-2 battles, the first <i>GBA Pokémon</i> combo doesn't really change the original formula.	7
Rayman Advance	Ubisoft	Rayman is just as good in 2D as he is in 3D. It looks great and provides a decent challenge.	7
Sonic Advance 2	THQ	<i>Sonic Advance 2</i> is much improved over the first one, and it connects to GameCube's <i>Sonic Adventure</i> games to boot.	8
Sonic Pinball Party	Sega	Not limited to just hedgehogs, Sega's solid pinball features battles from the classics <i>Nights</i> and <i>Samba de Amigo</i> .	6
Street Fighter Alpha 3	Capcom	Sure, the limiting button configuration prevents <i>SFA3</i> from being a completely accurate port, but it's great nonetheless.	6
Super Dodgeball Advance	Atlus	You're not going to find that many dodgeball games on the market, so thankfully this one is worthwhile. Better in multiplayer.	7
Super Ghosts & Ghosts	Capcom	Remember how frustrated you got playing through <i>Ghosts & Ghosts</i> ? Get ready to do it all over again.	6
Super Mario Advance: Super Mario 2	Nintendo	Aside from the odd naming system, you can't really complain about a portable version of <i>Super Mario Bros. 2</i> .	7
Super Mario Advance: 2: Mario World	Nintendo	There's really not much else that can be said except "portable <i>Super Mario World</i> " and "you should buy it."	7
Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	Yoshi is the star of this show, one of the greatest 2D platformers ever put to silicon. There are even a couple of new bonus levels.	9
Super Monkey Ball Jr.	THQ	An excellent port of the game that sold many a GameCube. THQ even included <i>Monkey Bowling</i> and <i>Monkey Fight</i> !	8
Super Puzzle Fighter II	Capcom	Sometimes, you just get bored with <i>Tetris</i> . <i>Puzzle Fighter II</i> is a fantastic port of a fantastic and highly addictive game. Buy it now.	8
Super Street Fighter II	Capcom	The combo of <i>SFA3</i> , <i>Gutter Gear X Advance</i> , and <i>Super Street Fighter II</i> is devastating. And you don't even need any quarters!	8
Tactics Ogre: The Knights of Lodis	Atlus	An incredibly deep strategy RPG with a branching story line and a rewarding battle system.	8
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3	Activision	It's amazing how <i>Activision</i> managed to cram <i>Tony Hawk</i> into a cartridge while keeping the essence of the console version intact.	8
Virtua Tennis	THQ	A surprisingly faithful rendition of the console versions with good visuals and an engaging World Tour mode. The best tennis on GBA.	8
Wario Land 4	Nintendo	The <i>Wario</i> series of platformers has always been excellent, and this one is no exception. Short but incredibly sweet.	8
Wario Ware, Inc.	Nintendo	A large collection of microgames fuels <i>Wario Ware</i> 's madcap mayhem. The freshest game we've seen in a long time.	9

BUY!

BOKTAI
Hideo Kojima's innovative sunlight game is equal parts *Metroid* *Dark* and garden greenhouse. But you better spend your daylight savings soon, the short, cold, and light-deprived days of winter are here—to break out the consoles again.



AVOID!

DIGIMON BATTLE SPIRITS

Is Digimon ever popular anymore? It's hard to keep up with these silly monster-based games. *Battle Spirits* is a Smash Bros. clone that lacks the immediate charm of *Smash Bros*. It also lacks the immediate fun. Avoid it immediately.



GBA



WE WAITED TWO YEARS FOR THIS? HEY, THAT'S LOW.

➔ "Uhh, Game Geezer? What are you doing outside? Why are you holding that cup?"

Eh? Whatcha say? What does it look like I'm doing? I'm standing on the corner, morose! Begging for money!

"But—" But nothing! Now go on! Get your fingers out of your nostrils and give an old man some coins or take a hike! I'm working here.

"But wait, Mr. Geezer! We don't get it! Why are you begging? Doesn't *GMR* pay you?"

Pay me? Those idiots? Yeah, sure, they pay me. In dog crap! But this money isn't for me, fools. When I need cash, I just sell Mrs. Geezer's unmentionables on eBay. Yes, sir. A man can live pretty well that way. This here money I'm collecting is for Microsoft!

Uhhhhh, Microsoft? Aren't they, like, hella rich? Well, they used to be. But it appears that Little Lord Brainiac up in Seattle there musta blown his whole stash on Yu-Gi-Oh! cards or lap dances or something, because otherwise, it doesn't add up.

"What doesn't add up?" Halo, fools! What do you

think I'm talking about? Halo! I waited two years for that dang thing to come out on PC. Now it finally does, but it looks like they ran outta money before they finished it! Well, at least I hope they ran out of money. Because if this is the actual finished product, then I'll tell you something for nothing: It stinks!

Yeah, you heard me! Halo on PC stinks! Where's the goldurned co-op mode? Where's the map cycling? Why does the game engine look older than Mrs. Geezer's flapping left buttock? Didn't those fools have two years and 8 billion dollars to work with? What could possibly be the excuse for this lazy, half-assed port?

Course, we know why it took so long. They held it back to sell more Xboxes. Fine! We get it! That's not the problem. The problem here is, now that they finally deign to put it on PC, they fart in our faces all over again by giving us a worse game than the original! Thanks a lot! Let me bend down further to make it easier on ya!

Listen to me, ninjas. Sure, the Halo campaign is great. It was great two years ago. We wanted something more on

PC, something to make us stop hating you for two seconds and make the wait worth it! Now we hate you twice as much! You take all this time, and this is all we get?

So that's why I'm out here, collecting pennies. It's for Microsoft. For the Halo 2 PC port. I figure if I start early and collect enough out here, I can send it to Seattle and they can pay someone to finish it this time, goddamn it!

But I dunno why I'm bothering. Only a fool would expect anything better at this point. Microsoft can blather on all they want about how they're still supporting PC, but, like Grandmammy Geezer always said to me while I was dangle on her knee on the back porch of our trailer home, "The proof is in the pudding, Little Geezer! The proof is in the pudding!"

And this here Halo pudding? It's givin' me one nasty mouth full of stink.



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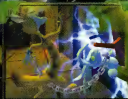


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